OTHER WORLDS

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May 1955

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OTHER WORLDS
Science Stories

SARAH & BRUCE

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RAY PALMER

BEA MAHAFFEY

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ABOUT once in ten years science fiction goes through a change that marks a milestone in its progress. In 1926 it graduated from occasional "fantasy" in books (and occasional shorts in various publications) to a magazine devoted entirely to itself. In 1936 Ray Palmer quit his job and went into science fiction as a full-time effort. In 1946 Ray Palmer decided to publish a magazine named OTHER WORLDS, and finally did, in 1949. In 1956, reborn OTHER WORLDS took over the science-fiction field leadership (after 1955, of course).

Actually, in 1936, it emerged from the depression, got out of its "kid pants," and began to boom. In 1946 it hit a peak that began to attract the attention of "commercial publishers." By 1954 it was actually a "dead duck" as far as its "commercial" future was concerned. There were a few publishers (named Ray Palmer) who realized something had to be done to make "fantasy" a respected member of the literary family, as it was in the days of Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and the early efforts of Ray Palmer. But what to do? We went to Bill Hamling for an answer and he told us to "forget science fiction, and put your dough into sex books! We'll make a mint! Everybody loves naked pitchers!" Sadly we looked elsewhere. Somehow we have always felt we had more originality than to use this logical answer to the problem of making money. No challenge to that! You just print a lot of sexy pictures, sell them under the counter for ten times what an ordinary photo of 'skiing on Mt. Helena" will bring, and if you're lucky you don't go to jail. No, Bill's wasn't the answer, and besides, we had no dough. Still, what to do?

A glimmering of an idea began to come to us, and like Jules Verne's submarine, it began to look

more and more logical. Better yet, it was something our competitors would never think of in a hundred years— they're not gifted with imaginative foresight like Ray Palmer! But in order to prepare the groundwork for it, we had to change our title to OTHER WORLDS, because the UNIVERSE is too limited, and doesn't cover the whole "fantasy" subject like H. G. Wells used to cover it.

We asked ourself just what is science fiction? And we were astounded at the answers we didn't get! Just ask *yourself* what it is? Do you really know? It can't be space travel, because you can read about that in the newspapers every day—when the army starts working on something, it's no longer either fantasy or science fiction. It can't be future wars, because future wars are now impossible—the first one we have will be our suicide, and besides who can imagine any worse weapons than we have? Only bigger ones, until we blow up the Earth. Edmond Hamilton has wrecked it so often in the past twenty years, that doesn't come under the heading of science fiction either. Electronics, television, sonar, radar, Belette Nylons . . . none of that is science fiction any more. Future styles of women? The new Dior Flatlander steals the thunder from worlds of other dimensions, especially of only two dimensions. All women will be good for if Dior isn't slain immediately is to slice cheese with—cheesecake will be a thing of the past. New inventions all seem tame besides the inventions already on the books Any future gadget we imagine will only be something with more nuts and bolts than what we already have, and that's just more of the same thing. No interest in that, and certainly no science fiction. Mad scientists are no longer convincing—all present-day scientists are nuts if they think they-'re doing us a service. Better they should dig ditches for a living.

Then what is science fiction? It exists, we know that. But *where?* Ah, there we have the answer? It exists in imagination, and the imagination is the most mysterious portion of the human mind. It is the portion of the mind from which *everything* comes. Science fiction used to say: "What man can imagine, he can do." Well, now he's done it! So, we've got to revise it to say: "What man can't do, imagination can!"

Let's look at that a little closer. What can't man do? Well, practically everything! For instance, he can't make one single hair on his head! He can't duplicate his fingernail as a plastic that will automatically renew itself. He can't define *himself!* He doesn't even

(*Continued on page* 125)

It's one thing to admire the singing and dancing of a beautiful slave; but it's another matter entirely when you purchase the slave and take him home with you. And have you ever tried explaining a situation like this to your fiance? The Lady Shanda had a problem on her hands.

GIFT OF ZAR

By D. C. Reese

Illustration by Lawrence

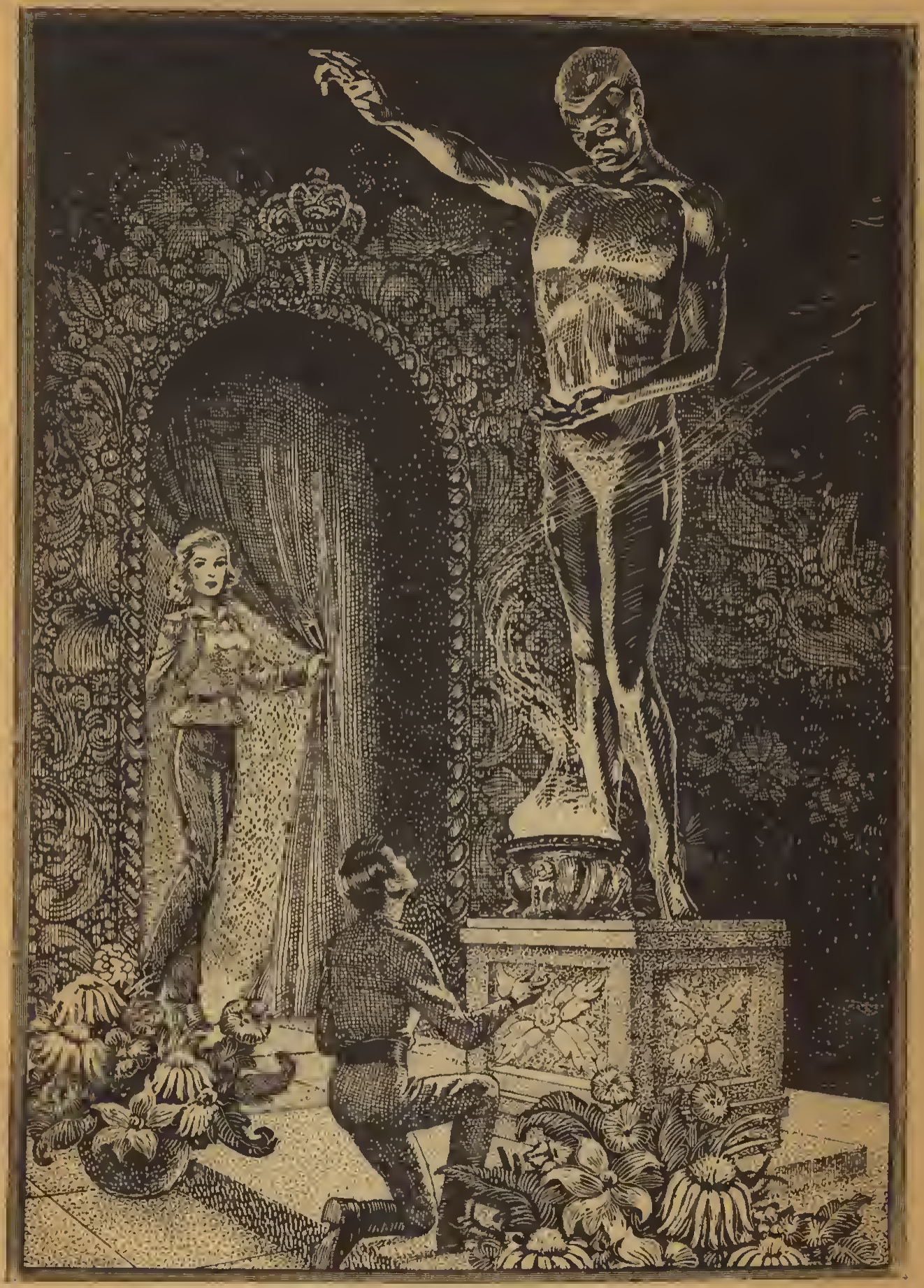
THE Lady Shanda accepted a cigarette and a light from Captain Petra, picked up her coffee cup, and settled back for a little pleasant after-dinner conversation. She liked Petra, and respected her. As a little girl, during her first trips into space with her mother, Petra had been kind to her. Then her mother had owned Galactic Minerals, Ltd. and the ships, and Petra had been second mate. Now Shanda owned the company and the ships, and Petra commanded one of them. She always travelled on Petra's ship if possible. This trip it carried a party of explorers looking for new planets; they were to drop Shanda at her destination on their way out.

Petra, lighting her own cigarette, looked up as the door behind Shanda opened, frowning because the newcomer had not knocked. "Come in, Lt. Drac," she invited drily.

"I'm sorry," Drac apologized, and came up to Shanda. "We were just listening to the news. Two more ships are gone. One of our freighters and the *Orion.*"

No one spoke for a minute; then Petra covered her face. Shanda got up and went quickly to her to put a hand on her shoulder. "Petra, I'm sorry." And to Drac, "Her sister was Captain of the *Orion.*"

Drac made a gesture of apology. "I'd forgotten. Do you remember who else was on the *Orion?* One planetary governor, two fairly important ambassadors, Lady Helena's chief inspector, and Dame Patricia."



Shanda sat down again. "Patricia —" Her best trouble-shooter, the one she could always depend on to straighten anything out to the satisfaction of all parties. And one of her best friends. "Almost as if they had a passenger list . . ."

Perhaps they did," Drac said deliberately. Her eyes met Shanda's narrowing glance in a long look, full of meaning.

Petra looked up. "Shanda, what's going on? what's happening? We're losing so many ships lately—"

Drac warned, "Security—"

"Blow security! I think it's time a little more was known. Time a better lookout was kept. Tighter security on the ships themselves— I've known Petra all my life. I'm going to tell her."

Drac shrugged her handsome shoulders and sat down. Shanda picked up her forgotten cigarette and began to talk. Petra, her hands folded stolidly before her, listened.

After a thousand years of peace, there was trouble again in the Empire. Strikes and sabotage at mines, in warehouses. Ships disappearing in space, goods and raw materials disappearing in space and from warehouses. Anti-Empire propaganda — oh, so subtle. Nothing you could label as dangerous or subversive by itself, but taken all together it added up to something dangerous. And it was not confined to non-humanoid planets, though it was, of course, worse there.

Petra nodded when she had finished. "I know. I've felt it — we've all felt it." She stirred restlessly. "It's nothing you can put your finger on Just a— *feeling*. You make your landing on one of the planets, and set about your business. Everyone is respectful, and cooperative, and and polite. But there's an undercurrent of hatred. Not everywhere, of course, and not all the time. You feel eyes boring into your back —" Shanda started; this flight of imagination from the practical Petra? "—and your skin crawls. And all time the feeling that it has nothing to do with you personally, but with your uniform. With *this.*" She touched the badge of Empire on her sleeve.

Drac asked quickly. "Have, you talked about this to anyone? Has anyone else noticed it?"

"We all have. All of us who travel regularly."

"Why hasn't anyone said anything? Reported it?"

Petra laughed. "Can't you imagine what would happen to a ship's captain who came into Headquarters and said "Please, Admiral, So-and-so at Such-a-place gave me a dirty look?' How long do you think she'd be in command of her ship?"

Shanda nodded. "How long has this been going on?"

"A couple of years. Less than

that, but not much." Her eyes met Shanda's speculatively. "I can't think. Have you been out lately? Or has that—" she touched Shanda's bracelet with the same insignia in ruby that was on her own sleeve in gold "—just not happened to show?"

"I haven't been out. Not the way you mean. Only on the governmental level."

"Just be sure it shows the next time you're unescorted," Petra said pointedly. "Or that it never shows at all."

"What—" Shanda's startled eyes went to Drac, back to Petra.

"Don't give anyone a chance to think you're hiding it. They don't like spies."

"Aren't you being a little melodramatic?" But her voice was uncertain.

"Do you remember the Shinn case? Shinn was my first mate. She died on Rigel III." Petra paused. Shanda and Drac waited. "She went out to have some fun. She wasn't in uniform, because she was off duty. But she wore a little silver pendant, with that insignia on it, round her neck on a chain. Her mother gave it to her when she became first mate. They were proud of that, you see. When she didn't come back, we searched. When we found her body, the pendant had been mutilated. Savagely. So had Shinn."

"I remember now. And you think —?"

"I do." The older woman's eyes held Shanda's steadily.

An alarm clanged somewhere. Something struck the ship as a hammer strikes a nail, and feet that could still run pounded toward battle stations. All the alarms at once, now— *battle stations* and *air leak* strident above the others.

They untangled themselves from the heap in which they had been thrown, Petra jumped for her space suit and her communicator, shouting a stream of automatic commands that were being obeyed almost before she uttered them. Drac wrenched open the jammed door and disappeared; Shanda followed, running for her own suit.

She had found it and was climbing into it when the lights went out; she half fell into the next cabin as the ship spun once, crazily.

A torch flashed and Drac was there.

"What happened?"

"Attack. Unidentified craft. One of the gunners gave the alarm and fired back just as their bolt hit us, only her aim was better! —" Drac smiled tightly. We're badly damaged, but the other ship is destroyed."

With her words came the odd jolt that announced the return to normal space. "Something wrong with

the drive," Drac said calmly. "They're looking for something to land on — anything to land on."

"Then it's bad." Shanda stated rather than asked.

Drac nodded. "They figure we've got a little more than an hour." The calm voice shook a little. "An hour. To find a planet, get to it, and land."

"All right. Can we get to the control room? Find out what's going on?"

"Yes. I just came from there."

The orderly chaos of emergency had taken the control room. The engineer was intent on her gauges and dials, apparently forgetting to breathe; Conne and her assistant pilot— Shanda didn't know her name—were searching space for something to sit on. The steady voice of the communications officer chanted the monotonous call for help, naming the ship and giving co-ordinates.

Lady Mary Barton, Shanda's aunt and the expedition's anthropologist, came quickly to ask if Shanda were all right. Before Shanda could do more than nod, Conne spoke.

"Here's something!" All but the engineer and communications crowded around her. "No telling what it's like yet, but it's a planet." She reached for instruments, worked silently for a few moments, wrote down a string of figures and symbols and passed it to communication. The monotonous voice added the new co-ordinates of the planet's sun, its orbit and estimated period.

The engineer did not look up.

Drac and Shanda stood back out of the way, beside Mary; they were only an intelligence officer and the owner of the ship, there was no place for them here.

Communications was suddenly silent, touched a key. A new voice spoke to them across millions of miles of space. How many millions? "GalMin 732 to GalMin 1149," it said, three times, and then, "We hear you. Estimate arrival 156 hours. Can you make that?"

They glanced at the engineer. She shook her head. "The ship won't."

"Will we make that planet?" Petra asked.

"We may."

Silence, and then the voice. "GalMin 1149. Can you hear me?"

"We hear you. We are determining reply."

Petra spoke, and the officer repeated. "we are trying to land on the planet at the co-ordinates given. Pick us up there." She gave the information again.

"We've got you," said the voice, suddenly personal. "Good luck, Rasc."

"Thanks, Werth. Just don't stop

to pick any daisies." She switched off the conserve power.

It was a long hour. They all watched the gauges that meant something only to the engineers and, perhaps, Conne and Petra. They watched them flicker and die, making others flicker more wildly. One large one crept inexorably toward a red line. The planet, a pinpoint of light in the viewplate, grew to a disc, an orb, filled the plate and seemed to disappear, leaving only swirls of light and dark on the screen.

"Cloud-bound," the Lady Rilla spoke for the first time. She was the physicist, chemist, and astrophysicist. "No way of telling what's down there. Except that it's going to be cold." She nodded toward the remote sun on the long-distance viewplate.

"Do we have time to investigate?" Petra to the engineer.

"No."

Conne looked around. "Evacuate in the scouts, or take the whole thing down?"

Petra looked around the control room, her stolid, homely old face grim. "Take him down. He'll never fly again." She turned away, and Shanda touched her shoulder gently in sympathy.

They went down into thick, driven snow, beams feeling for the surface. Conne shouted, "Hang on," and they set down with a bone-shaking jar, seemed to bounce once, and heeled slightly to starboard.

"Evacuate immediately," the engineer's voice was urgent. "You've got twenty minutes."

As it turned out, it was thirty-two minutes. They got the wounded out, and some of the portable equipment and adequate supplies. Adequate, if 732 arrived on time The dead they left where they were. Petra and the engineer hurried the last ones out, and ran to join the others behind an outcrop of rock.

There were flames in the drive room now; they seemed to subside for a moment as the ship gave up its life in a swirling green, incense-like spiral. Then a blinding green flash and concussion knocked the watchers breathless, and the ship was gone.

A frozen world of rugged peaks and riven plains, cloud-bound, and tortured by howling gales. Snow and ice and thin air and cold beyond imagination. No life could exist here, or even sustain itself for long, unless they could find shelter; near enough to the blast area so that the rescue ship could find them.

If it came in time.

They broke into little groups and Petra was briefing them when someone caught a movement on the

plain a little below them. Then snow again, blotting everything out; when the little storm subsided the thing that had moved was closer.

Spens, linguist, biologist, physiologist, exclaimed and took a step forward. "Human! Or humanoid—"

Shanda and Mary joined her quickly, Mary protesting, "It can't be —"

"It is," Shanda said. "They are. Look."

The little winding file came up to them and stopped. Natives and strangers stared in mutual curiosity.

The natives numbered twelve, three women and nine men. The men carried packs and the women bore weapons.

"Matriarchal," Mary murmured. It was a relief to all of them. Cultures with the male dominant always presented difficulties. Not that there were many.

Mary stepped forward and bowed with courtesy and dignity. One of the native women came nearer a pace and returned the bow. Mary extended her empty hands in the universal gesture of peace. The woman did the same, and the two groups edged a little closer. The Terrans' helmets and heated suits fascinated the natives; they stared and pointed and jabbered among themselves.

"Spens," Mary said without turning her head, "did we save the language machine?"

"Yes."

"Good. Now if we can just persuade one of them into it —"

It took some time. Finally, apparently believing that a sacrifice was wanted, they selected one of the men. He struggled until one of them slapped him; while two of them held him, the third bound his hands behind his back, then dumped him in a heap at Mary's feet. She frowned, but didn't feel that she dared interfere. All she could do was to smile and pet him. He stared at her, terrified.

"See if you can calm him a little," Spens suggested, adjusting her machine.

Mary took off her glove and stroked his cheek gently; it was icy. She pulled his parka back about his face and spoke to Spens. "This is going to be difficult. Can you get your stuff on him without taking off his parka? Because he'd freeze" Her own hand felt numb in just this short time. She smiled down at him again, warmly, as his cheek turned trustingly into her palm. "I think he's decided I won't hurt him. Can you give that to me and tell me what to do?" She nodded toward the thing like an old radio headset that Spens held in her hand. Spens handed it over.

"I think so. Just put the two

plates firmly on each temple. The span adjusts by that screw on top. When it is tight, but not uncomfortably so, turn the switch you see near the screw to 'One.' That's all just now."

Mary showed him the gadget, indicating how it would be applied to him, and smiled again, hoping to get across that it wouldn't hurt.

He gasped and moved slightly as the wide band that should have fitter across the top of his head came down over his eyes. Mary moved it enough to let him see, and gradually tightened the screw. Smiling reassuringly again, she touched the switch. After a few moments, "He's out."

"Good." Spens glanced at the watching natives, and then knelt beside him. She found the pulse just where it should be in a human throat.

At last she moved the switch to another setting. "We can start now. You stay here, and turn off the switch when I tell you." Mary nodded and Spens returned to the machine.

Terrans and natives alike watched her curiously. She watched gauges and made minute changes in dials. It didn't really take very long, it just seemed like it. At last she called To Mary, "Turn it off. And take it off him before he wakes."

Mary obeyed. As Spens took back gadget and began rolling up the cord, the man sat up, looking dazedly about him.

Mary said, "There, that didn't hurt after all, did it?"

"No—" his startled look broke into a broad grin. "It didn't. But my head feels funny."

"It won't in a minute," Spens consoled.

"I can understand you!"

"Yes."

The woman who seemed to be in command of the party came up and questioned him sharply. He replied; she asked him something else, was answered, and than the man turned back to Spens. "She wants to be next."

"Fine," Spens said and smiled at the woman, who sat down and waited.

After her, another of the women wanted the treatment. "Can't we go someplace where it's warmer?" Spens suggested, and they recalled their manners.

The Terrans, boiling down a long and formal speech, were invited to the place of Her Majesty, Queen Chanzar. After a little semantic difficulty, it was discovered to be about two miles away. They decided to use the two scout ships, coming back for the rest of their stuff whenever it was convenient. Four trips should take everyone and the language machine, which seemed to be the only piece of large

equipment they would need.

The women wouldn't let the slaves ride, and sent the lowest-ranking woman back with them. She went off, angry, the men following, looking back wistfully until another storm blotted them out.

The planet was called Zara, "The Realm of Zar." Zar was the sun, and their god. Mary, who had always contended that sun-worship once existed, even on Terra, but could never find any actual proof, was so excited, that Shanda said she was practically incandescent.

Zara's day was forty-two Terran hours long, with eighteen hours of daylight in this latitude, and a very cold period during the long night. Its gravity was one and a half of Terra's, and its people bigger and stronger than the average Terran. Its period of revolution was five and one half years, and it was now almost at the point of its farthest swing from Zar, on a sharply elliptical orbit; at the other end it came much closer, though still too far away to provide any sort of thawing. It was simply less unbearably frigid. Its atmosphere contained less oxygen than Terra's but was breathable.

They lived underground, and grew their food in hydroponic tanks by artificial sunlight.

This was the sum of the strangers' knowledge by dinner time on the first night.

Chanzar had invited Shanda, Mary, and Petra to dine with her; afterward there would be entertainment to which everyone was invited.

One of the first lessons a space traveller has to learn is, "When in Rome do as the Romans do." The axiom had lost its original meaning a million years ago, but its connotation had lived with it.

Fortunately, Shanda was an experienced traveller; she had even been on worlds such as this before, where every male was a slave, and every slave a male. She had never grown easy about being served and dressed by men, but had learned to bear it. She bore it tonight, although there was little that they had to do for her; one of her bags had been saved by someone in the confusion, but it contained only jackets and slacks and shirts for everyday wear, suits similar to the one she had on, nightclothes, and a box that proved to contain her jewels.

Chan proved to be a gracious hostess, and the customs were not too different from their own. The efficient Spens had investigated the hydroponic "gardens" and reported that she had found nothing poisonous, though she would be interested to hear how they liked certain items.

Dining with them was a neighboring queen, Ildzar, who was there, they gathered, simply on a

visit with her friend. Shanda liked both of them.

They dropped the *zar* from their names in informal conversation, and Chan invited her guests to do so.

After dinner they moved from the small dining room into the Great Hall. The other Terrans and the palace household were there waiting, gathered in little groups before the roaring fires that walled the room.

A low dais, recessed in its own semi-circle of fires, was reserved for Chanzar and her guests of honor. It was furnished with soft, low seats rather like a Terran chaise longue, and they settled back and prepared to be entertained.

There were a juggler, three tumblers, and a singer of ballads. One of the songs told of the catastrophe that had torn Zara from its favored position near Zar, and of the hardship and pain and death that followed, until Zar took pity on them and came to them one morning in human form, out of the sunrise, in a silver ship, and taught them how to live *in* their ruined world instead of on it. It told of Zar, of Zar's divine kindness, of Zar's beauty. Never a pronoun; always *Zar,* no matter how awkwardly it occurred. Mary listened, enthralled, and sighed when the song was done and the singer bowed himself out.

The lights went out for a minute, to be replaced by a bright spotlight centered directly in front of Shanda, only a few feet away. The Terran women sat up and gasped; someone—Ild?—said "Zaryn," on a long sigh.

He stood poised in the circle of light, dressed in silver, the slender body on demi-point stretched to its fullest extent, his hands lightly back-to-back at arm's length above his head, the slim fingers with their long scarlet nails curved delicately. His black hair lay in short, crisp curls about his perfect head; hands and face had been gilded; beneath slanted brows long, wide eyes like emeralds looked into Shanda's. As she stared back at him the music started, throbbing, primitive, wailing, a single instrument whose like she had never heard; the beautiful scarlet lips smiled, and he began to dance.

A silver illusion born of the music, moved by it, boneless, weightless; grace personified, silver and gold, emerald and scarlet. Shanda never knew how long it lasted, only that it was not long enough, not nearly long enough, before the light went out. When the hall lights came up again, he was gone.

She turned in a daze to meet Chan's eyes and her gratified smile. "My son pleases you?"

"He's beautiful—he's the most

beautiful thing I ever saw." Her son. Her son, but still a slave, a dancer at her court. It was shocking . . .

A worse shock was coming. "I'll send him to your room at once. Please use him as your own while you are here."

Shanda, about to refuse, caught Mary's warning eye, and choked. "Thank you." She had been about to add that she was honored, but thought better of it. "You are very kind," she substituted.

"Anything Milady desires is hers," Chan said absently, and turned her attention to the next item on the program. At its end she rose. "The cold time is almost here; the only way to endure it is to go to bed. May I guide you to your room?"

He was waiting there for her, sitting by the fire. He got up quickly when she came in, and came to help her undress. She saw that he had her gown and robe warming by the fire and handed him her jacket and scarf with thanks. She found, as he went to hang them up, that she couldn't let him undress her; he seemed bewildered, but obediently busied himself with his back turned until she was into gown and robe and spoke to him again. He came back to her, then, and knelt beside the dressing table to watch her clean her face.

Here in the brighter light she saw him clearly for the first time. She had thought that he had not changed, or removed his makeup except for the long red nails; now she saw that he had. His costume had been much like a Terran dancer's tights; he still wore silver, but now it was plain slacks and a shirt with full sleeves and wide, tight cuffs. And he had not been made up at all. His skin was golden, his mouth naturally scarlet. Even the eyelashes were real.

He was admiring her, too. He had never seen a blonde before, nor blue eyes, nor fair, creamy skin; the people of Zara were uniformly dark. Neither spoke until she picked up her hairbrush, when he held out his hand. "May I?" She gave it to him, and watched the slim hands almost caressing her hair. His admiration pleased her more than she would admit; not particularly handsome by Terran standards, she wasn't used to it.

"You spoke my language," she realized.

"Yes, Milady. They stuck my head in a machine and I went to sleep, and when I woke up I knew it," he explained wonderingly.

Shanda smiled. And they stuck my head in it, and I knew yours. It's very handy; we have to know hundreds of languages, you see.

"It must be," he agreed. He had finished the brushing now, and began to arrange her hair in its short,

crisp waves. Under the slim hands it lay exactly as it was meant to, she saw, much better than she could do it. Better than her maid could do it.

She began to wonder just how much service he was supposed to give; even in this short time she had gathered that neither marriage nor monogamy was customary on Zara.

She was soon to find out. Her hair done, he went to make up her bed. She had wondered, too, where she was supposed to sleep, and found that it was on the great fur rug before the fire. Under the rug was something deep and soft, it would be quite comfortable. Now Zaryn got a thick, light cover from a cupboard, and a pillow, and stood waiting to take her robe. He laid it over the back of the dressing table bench while she settled herself, and then came back to tuck the cover warmly about her. She smiled up at him and thanked him.

He stayed kneeling there beside her for a moment, uncertain. She had made no indication one way or the other—his hand went to the opening of his shirt. "Does Milady want me?"

"No. Go on to bed." Still he did not move for a minute. Did he expect to sleep with her? If it got any colder, a companion would be most welcome, perhaps that was what he expected.

It was. But he saw that he wasn't going to get it, and compromised on next best. "If Milady pleases, I had better stay here and keep the fire going. If I may sleep here at this end?" He indicated a spot a few feet away.

"Will you be warm there?"

"Oh, yes. Milady is very kind."

She watched him get another cover and curl up, seeming to fall asleep immediately. Shanda slept too.

He proved a most excellent servant next morning anticipating her wishes so that she seldom had to give an order, laying out the clothes she indicated without trying again to help her to dress, serving her breakfast deftly.

Mary came in just as he was going out with the tray. She looked after him and laughed a little. "Well, now we know who Zar was, don't we? Shanda, I've never been so excited. Did you hear that song? And Chan's going to make him come and recite it to me, slowly, so I can get it word for word—"

Here, back up! What do you mean, we know who Zar was?"

Mary sat down, and laughed again. "Didn't you recognize your cousin?"

"My *what?*"

Her aunt watched her speculatively for a moment. "Listen, Shanda. What does *Zaryn* mean?"

Shanda thought. "Gift of Zar."

"Right. And he's the Gift because he looks like Zar, isn't he?"

"I don't know—is he?"

"He is I asked." She paused. "Look here, haven't you *seen* that picture I have of our Umpteen-greats-Uncle Zachariah?"

"I don't think so, why?"

"You don't need to, now. Zaryn could have stepped out of its frame. He's exactly like him—"

"Sol and Luna! The mutant? The one that disappeared, that ran away—"

Mary nodded. "Because he didn't like the woman his mother had promised him to. And stole his sister's space ship—the little fool had taught him to pilot it—and was never heard of again. We always assumed he'd simply died in space, but you heard that song, didn't you?"

"Yes—but could he have done all that?"

"Oh, yes. He was brilliant, and they let him learn anything he liked. Spoiled little brat—no one could resist him, of course, He got everything he wanted."

"Except to choose whom he should marry."

"Oh, that of course. But the Richards were of high rank then, you know. His marriage was political. Caused a lot of trouble when he ran away."

"But how can you be so sure? That he is—was—Zar, I mean?"

"Zachariah Amos Richards. And monograms were the height of fashion just then. Even in the picture I have, there's one over his breast pocket. Very fancy, embroidered in gold." She made an impatient gesture. "And look at Zaryn." She watched Shanda absorb this. Shanda, the head of her house, and therefore responsible for the welfare of its remotest member.

A member of her house, a slave. How many others here deserved her protection too?

"Mary, tell me something. Why are men and women absolutely equal, socially and economically, in some cultures? Or men not quite equal, as in ours? And slaves in some—and dominant in others?"

"Depends on the degree of social development," Mary explained. "The more advanced the culture, the more nearly equal the sexes are. 3,000 years ago men were practically slaves on Terra, you know. Not as bad as here, but expected to obey their mothers implicitly until marriage, and then to obey their wives. And a million years ago it was the other way around."

"You mean, men—?"

"Oh, yes. We're certain—there's good evidence. Then just before space travel was achieved, women were nearly—but not quite—equal. Then they became dominant."

But why? What caused the

change?"

"Lots of things. Chiefly, I think, that women proved better space travellers than men. We are, you know. Especially, better pilots. Women's hands are much quicker at learning and performing the rapid, complicated firing patterns on the control board. And we were much more able to stand the long confinement and boredom of the early trips, some of which took years. More tolerant of pain and discomfort. More disease-resistant. More adaptable. And then machinery took from men the advantage of their physical strength, though women still admire it. Of course the invention of tank babies, freeing women from physical birth, finished it. We took over."

"I see," Shanda said thoughtfully when Mary was silent. "Thanks."

Zaryn came back into the room, and the problem of how many more relatives she had here returned.

No way of knowing, she discovered. It was most unusual for Zaryn to know who his mother was, let alone his father—even he didn't know that—it was only because he was Zaryn. Male babies were simply raised by the other slaves, their mothers seldom even looked at them, certainly did not keep them. Girls, of course, were different. He had three sisters; they were gone, visiting a friend. He knew he had several brothers, but had no idea which ones they were.

"Well, I might as well do a little exploring and get it over," Shanda said after a thoughtful silence. "Sooner or later, and it might as well be sooner. Send Drac to me, will you?" As Mary got up to go.

"Of course. Shanda, what are you going to do about—" she broke off, nodded toward Zaryn, whose back was to her.

"I don't know. What can I do?"

Mary didn't know.

Drac found Shandra rather preoccupied. She was piloting the scout, while Shanda checked instruments and stared off at nothing. Several attempts at conversation having failed miserably, Drac let her alone after a while and spent the time being glad that they wouldn't be on this frigid place for long. She liked warmth and bright sunshine, herself, and bathing in warm seas . . . she shivered and zipped her jacket up tightly against her throat, turning up the heater with the other hand.

They went up high and spiralled around the planet at top speed. Needles quivered and moved and sank back to rest again upon their dials, and Shanda marked her hastily made chart and was silent.

Hours later, as it was nearly dark and they were almost home again, Drac yawned and reached

once more for the jug she had thoughtfully had filled with boiling *skri,* a beverage much like tea, before starting out. As she reached, a needle gone crazy caught her eye. She paused; it was one that had not moved before, she thought—it continued to dance for almost a minute—at that speed!—before it died.

"Turn back," Shanda ordered, her voice excited. They watched the needle dance and die again, and again, and again, as they quartered the area, back and forth, making the bounds of the field.

"What is it?" Drac asked Shanda as they headed home.

"Tungsten. Drac, I'm—speechless. It's practically pure, and there's more of it than I ever heard of in one place. Enough to last for centuries, we'll hardly have to ration it any more—do you realize what this means? All the high-speed steel we need, all the ships we want, all the . . ." she stopped, lost in dreams of what this could mean. Her mind leapt ahead of the economic advantage that she had found it, herself, for Galactic Minerals, her own company. They'd have to buy it from whoever owned the ground, of course, but no expensive royalities to a discoverer, no finder's rights to contend with. If this didn't get her the ministry, nothing would. Lady Shanda Barton, Duchess, Marquisa, Countess, Minister of Foreign Trade. The youngest minister in history—by about 50 years. This would wipe those 50 years out. Now if Girda could only get on with dying . . .

The present Minister had long passed the average life expectancy. She'd had a full, good life, and she had been in the process of dying for over a year. Delicacy did not permit even a hint of who would be appointed to succeed her until after she had been cremated and scattered.

But Girda was dying, and Helena was Shanda's only real rival. Helena, of Galactic Communications Corp., and Shanda's fellow Undersecretary. She was too young too, but she was a good ten years older than Shanda—an unfair advantage. This would wipe that out, . . . and if she could marry Raoul, the Empress' youngest son . . .

Shanda dreamed happily and with such concentration that an amused and sympathetic Drac had to tell her when they had landed.

Zaryn lay by the fire when she came in. The sound of the latch brought him up on his knees. Shanda stood in the doorway a moment, looking at him.

Scarlet velvet tonight, embroidered in gold. Scarlet lips, golden skin, black hair, emerald eyes, framed by the white fur rug; he saw that he pleased her and smiled,

content.

She came and sat beside him. "Sit down, my dear. You needn't be on your knees every time I look at you—what are you reading?" She reached out and picked up the book, leafing through it idly. A sentence caught her eye; she read a paragraph or two and looked up at him, startled. Philosophy. She reread the page, and didn't get much out of it. "Do you understand this?"

"Yes, Milady."

"Tell me."

He began, hesitantly at first, then with more confidence as he warmed to his subject; before long he had, perforce, to branch out into other philosophers' thoughts; she heard Plato, and Socrates, and Locke, and Adam Smith, and the first faint forerunner of Marx. Only the names were exotic and feminine . . . She must tell Mary tonight, she'd like to investigate this example of parallel development of thought as well as physical structure. Odd, unless Zachariah had sown the seeds—possible, of course.

"Why are you so interested in this?"

"I believe that Zaryns are given for a purpose, but we don't know what it is. I'm the only one who cares—it's up to me to find out."

"You mean there have been others like you?"

"Oh, yes—many. We occur once in about 20 generations. And always there is only war and trouble over us. Unttil we get killed in the fight, somehow, and then there is peace again until another of us is born. That isn't right—it can't be. We are Zar Gifts, his favor follows us. Surely Zar has some purpose for us. But I can't see it—if one of us were ever female, she would rule Zara, she could do so much good. But we are always male, useless and helpless. If only I could figure it out—" He fell silent, one slim hand twisting the fur of the rug.

Slave, said her mind. *This intelligent, seeking, thinking, mind belongs to a slave. No rights, no defenses, dependent for his very life upon a woman's whim. A member of my house . . .*

"Milady, forgive me," he begged. "I didn't mean to talk so much. It's nearly dinner time; how may I serve my lady?"

"I was interested," she reassured him. "You must tell me more, when we have time. I want to know all about you and what you do." *And what is done to you.*

More guests tonight; the news of the strangers had travelled fast, it seemed. Shanda set herself to find out, without saying why, who owned the tungsten.

It belonged to an unplesant woman named Neldzar. Shanda had disliked her at sight and regretted

having to enrich her. Shanda's deals were always scrupulously fair; but now she made up her mind to give this woman the least possible royalty. The next day she did just that, taking pleasure in getting what she wanted for a tiny fraction of the percentage it deserved. She finished her negotiations just after breakfast, and now the long day, and the next, and most of the next stretched before her with no work in them, nothing at all that she had to do. It had been years since she'd had a day like that, even one day. She found it extraordinarily pleasant.

Chan, a good hostess, had what would have been called a tea on Terra, late that afternoon. And then there was the dinner, and the usual entertainment afterward, with another dance by Zaryn. But breakfast and lunch were served on trays in each guest's room, so she had time to talk to Zaryn, and to get to know him.

What she learned only added to her concern. It was as she had guessed: a woman's power over her slaves was absolute; she could torture, maim, or kill and no questions asked.

"Why do you submit?" she asked curiously. "You're stronger than they are, and there are more of you. Why don't you resist?"

"Nothing they do to us is as bad as what they do to a rebel. I saw it once . . ." He turned his head away, but she had seen his face and did not ask what he had seen. Kept in check by fear. Naturally. It would be the only safe way.

"Are you happy, Zaryn? Is your mother kind to you?"

"Oh, so kind—" He had a small room of his own, he told her, instead of living in the slave quarters. And he had been taught to read and write along with his sisters. He was the only man on Zara who could read and write, and who had a room of his own. And the only man to have a fur rug; and then quickly, ashamed of bragging, "It's just a little one. Nothing like this."

Shanda resolved to send him a fur rug to end all fur rugs on the first ore ship. And then thought, *NO, better not.* Better find out first if they would let him keep it; she didn't want to disappoint him.

He had lovely clothes, too, he went on. Shanda agreed with this; it was bottle green velvet today, the color of his eyes, and she could look at nothing else. He should have her emerald jewelry when she left, clip and ring and bracelet. She'd make Chan promise to let him have them, he should have emeralds.

He never had to wear his mother's livery. In fact, he didn't even

own any. He didn't have to work like the others, either, only now and then, for a guest of honor, and he didn't mind that—he smiled at Shanda.

He worked at his dancing, and the costumes and music. That reminded Shanda of the strange instrument and she asked him about it. He laughed with delight—a pleasant sound. "I sing it," he told her. "And record it. Then it's just as I want it."

"But how do you make it sound so odd?"

"Odd?" He was puzzled. "I just sing it," and he demonstrated. Shanda wondered if Spens had looked at his throat, and if Zachariah had sung like that too. Then concern for his welfare overcame her again.

"She doesn't hurt you, does she? She wouldn't?"

"Oh, no, not unless I'm disobedient, and that was only once." About a year ago, he explained, she had told him not to do something, and he had. "It's funny, I can't even remember now what it was." And she had found out, and had ordered him hung by the wrists. This was a mild punishment, Shanda gathered, and he had not thought it was so bad at first. "And then it began to be uncomfortable, and then it began to hurt. And then it began to hurt all over, and there was nothing that would ease it. I don't know how long it was—it seemed like days." Shanda caught him by the shoulders with a small cry of pity, and he laughed up at her. "Milady, don't look like that. She came in just as the first convulsion started, and grabbed a knife and cut me down and held me. And said she was sorry, she hadn't meant to leave me there so long."

He was proud of that, Shanda realized. Proud that she had cut him down herself, and proud that she had said she was sorry.

"I'm afraid I'm spoiled," he went on lightly. "I'm going to hate to leave here."

"Leave? Why?"

All at once he leaned his head on her shoulder. As her arms went around him, "She has to give me to someone, some time. Before long, now."

"Who? Do you know?" He nodded, and clung to her. "Ild?" The way Ild had looked at him—

"No. Not any more."

She thought, *He's frightened.* "Who?"

"Neldzar."

"*No!* She's—" Shanda stopped. She didn't like the woman, but she knew nothing about her, really. "Is she kind?"

"No."

"And Chan would give you to her anyway? Why?"

"She doesn't want to, she can't

help it. Neld is powerful, far the strongest queen on Zara. There won't be any war over me, like there's always been before, about the other Zaryns. No one is strong enough to fight her. She'll just take me. I'm glad."

"No." She said it quietly, but with such firmness that he raised his head to see her face. "Our ship is coming day after tomorrow. I'll take you home with me. Will you come, Zaryn?"

"*Yes!*" His arms came up around her neck, his lips lifted . . . she kissed him briefly, and smiled, and set him away from her.

"That's settled, then." She was surprised at her own relief. As soon as he had got used to the place, he could go on the stage. His dancing, especially at Terran gravity, would be a sensation. He'd be rich in a year.

As she got ready for dinner, she told him this. That he thought he would be her slave, thought that the money he earned—he was not sure what this was, anyway—would be hers, not his, did not occur to her. He didn't mention it, to him it was unimportant. He was just glad he would be of use to her.

Three hours before the ship was due, everyone who could crowd into the scout was there, helping Rasc listen on the little radio for the first call. They joked with each other, and talked about how glad they'd be to get off this place, and pitied the miner who was going to live there. A few of them got a card game going; someone started singing and the rest joined in. Jugs of *skri* circulated, and more was sent for. Only Rasc sat silently, close to the speaker, not joining in any of the fun. She was the one officially on duty. She was the one who answered when someone said, "Isn't it about time?"

"It's an hour and seventeen minutes past the time."

The crew was still. Rasc heard the sound of breathing, and the rustle of cloth as someone moved a little, and the hum of a radio that is alive and waiting for a message that does not come.

They took turns after that, in groups of three or four. And when they were not out helping in the long watch, they began to look at their slaves—the crew had been assigned one each—in a way they had not before. When three or more of the long Zaran days had passed the rest began to tease two or three of their number who had been seen with their slaves in their arms.

"Why not?" Rasc defended herself. "It looks like a long, cold winter. I, for one, am not going to spend it alone."

For answer she got a thoughtful silence.

The third mate, who was present, reported this to the second mate, who told the first mate, who told Petra. "As long as it's not any of the married ones," she shrugged. "what the others do is nobody's business but theirs." And as the first mate, feeling rebuffed, turned to go, "But in that case, tell me at once."

Petra, amused, told Shanda, who made a face. "Oh, well, you know what space crews are like. Or you should. But I agree, if it goes much further, something will have to be done."

Nothing more happened for two more endless days. Two long days of listening to nothing, of growing unease. It was no use for the officers to give bright little talks to the crew about all the things that could have happened to delay the ship, they knew these as well as the officers did; but it had to be done. And they had to maintain a cheerful, confident front that did not very successfully hide their own fear.

That night the third mate, who had shared a room with the second, moved into another room with her slave. She was married, and had three children. The first mate reported this to Petra as per command, and Petra called a conference of the officers, including Drac and Shanda and Mary.

It was not a success. After a time Petra dismissed them with orders to do what they could about the crew's rapidly disappearing morale. Mary, Drac, and Shanda stayed; the four sat watching the last back disappear through the door.

Petra was worried too, and irritable, and tired. She turned on Drac. "You weren't much help."

Drac stared down at her clasped hands. "No. I thought it better to keep quiet."

"Why?"

Drac looked up then to meet Petra's eyes steadily. "Didn't you know? I brought my slave today. From Chan. For my wristwatch. He's sweet," she said dreamily. "If the ship comes, I'm going to take him home and marry him. If it doesn't—"she didn't finish.

Buy him, Shanda thought. *Buy Zaryn. From Chan, if she can still sell him. Or from Neld. If Neld will sell him . . . she's greedy, she might.* And then, chilling her, the thought, *What with?* One of the richest women in the Galaxy, and she hadn't enough to buy Zaryn's life. If the ship didn't come.

"Well, that does it," Mary said, and stood up. "I wager Chan does a brisk trade in the next day or so. Good night."

That night when Zaryn covered her he did not move away as he always did, but stayed looking

gravely down into her face. "Milady is worried," he said "And unhappy."

"Yes. You know our ship hasn't come — it's long overdue now. We pretend that we haven't given up hope, but we have." He put out a hand toward her, and she caught and held it. "Zaryn, what about you? Could Chan still sell you to me?"

"No, I'm not hers any more. I go with Neld when she leaves here."

"Would Neld sell you to me?"

"No. Not me. Zar's favor goes with me. She wouldn't sell that."

But Shanda wondered. She had seen Neld look at him, and what she had seen was not religion, but desire. If only she had something Neld wanted, something to trade.

III

She did. She found out about it the next night, just before dinner. She had gathered that it was to be a gala occasion, since some of the guests would leave the next day, so she wore her best suit, and her diamonds. The idea came to her when Zaryn saw them. She laughed at his excitement and wonder, at first, and then it occurred to her. None of the Zarans wore a single gem. Ornaments, yes. Gold and silver and copper, but no gems at all. She had planned to wear the clip in a twist of her scarf. It was in the form of a sunburst, and reasonably spectacular even if you were used to diamonds. Now she added the earrings, bracelet and ring that matched it, kissed Zaryn for luck, and went down to dinner.

The diamonds were a sensation. Neld, always rude, fondled each piece as they asked about it. Shanda bore her touch and her nearness with all the control she could muster. After a time the others, more mannerly, dropped the subject, but Neld's eyes followed every sparkling move she made.

After dinner Zaryn danced. The room was still, as always every eye upon him, so that every eye saw what happened.

He flashed along the edge of the dais in a chain of pirouettes so fast the eye could hardly follow, and Neld reached out and yanked him down across her, the narrow arm of her chair in the small of his back, capturing his hands between her knees. Shanda, frozen, saw the hand in his hair, forcing his head back to meet her bruising kiss, twist cruelly.

Ild had leapt up, to be held back by the women near her. She wept openly, not trying to hide her mannish tears.

Then, as though his muffled

cry were what she had been waiting for, Neld pushed him off her to land on his back and roll out of her reach. And laughed.

Zaryn lay still for a moment, then got up slowly and groped totoward the door, all the lithe grace gone.

"Why, you—" Shanda stood before her, and Neld laughed again at her white face.

"He's mine," she said. "And I want my property. I'll give you half an hour to say goodbye." She nodded, as though in dismissal.

But Shanda's only thought was for Zaryn. She whirled and ran after him, Chan following. Her room — surely that's where he'd be . . .

He lay face down on the rug, his hands clenched in the fur, his head buried in the crook of one arm, crying — she touched him, called his name, and the shaking body was in her arms. "My darling, don't. She shan't have you, not if I have to kill her. It's all right —" and then Chan was there too.

"My little one, my baby. We'll fight her, I won't give you to her. Don't cry like that. We'll fight to the last arrow, the last woman, and if we lose I'll kill you myself. I didn't know," she said to Shanda. "She has a reputation for cruelty, but I didn't know she was like that. She enjoyed it, didn't she? She liked hurting him. Zaryn, listen, stop. I won't let her have you—"

"Yes," he said quietly, and sat up. Shanda reached for a handkerchief, but he didn't need it. His eyes were not red, his nose wasn't stopped up — tears did not mark him at all.

He held his mother's hand to his cheek. "I'm sorry you had to see that. I hoped you'd never know what she's like. The slaves know. I've known. I'm prepared for it. Or I thought I was . . . But I won't have a war over me. I'll only live a year or so — I'm going with her"

"No!" The two women spoke together.

Shanda smiled at his mother. "You stay out of this — don't have anything to do with it. Send me Drac, and Abbott — that's my secretary — and ask Drac to bring four good women from the crew. Armed. And a gun for me. Then go back to your guests and *don't leave*. I'm going to try to buy him, and if that fails, I'll kill her. You've got to get clear and stay clear. Please — do as I say."

Chan looked at her for a moment, touched Zaryn's hair, and ran.

"Milady, don't — Neld's killer would be tortured to death. Please, Milady, I couldn't bear

that —"

But his pleas did not move her. Her allies' coming stopped him, and she left him to give her orders.

Abbott she put in the next room, with instructions to make out a bill of sale for Zaryn, and not come until she was called. Drac and the crew-women were concealed about the room, told what she intended and instructed. She came back to him then, the strange, harmless looking little weapon in her hand. He'd never seen an energy gun before. He thought, what could it do against a sword? He gnawed the back of his hand and she saw the firelight gleam on the steady stream of silent tears.

"My sweet." She slipped one arm under his shoulders, rescued the hand from the sharp teeth and held it against her throat, seeking for some way to comfort him. She began to tell him what Terra was like; how green, how warm, how beautiful, with its clear blue sky and white clouds and sunshine, or its gentle rain. He listened, only half comprehending but comforted by her warm, soft voice and kind face. How wonderful it would be to belong to her, to live in that beautiful world with this gentle lady, with Shanda whom he loved so much. He didn't believe it could happen, it was simply too good to happen.

Shanda stopped talking and looked down into his loving face, half hypnotized by that bemused emerald gaze. *How beautiful you are*, she thought, *and how sweet, and how dear here in the curve of my arm*. Her hand moved down his arm to his body, pulling him close, and she kissed his temple gently, and the corner of his lips, and his sweet mouth.

Zaryn had been kissed many times in his short life at court: laughingly, passionately, casually, hungrily, but never like this, never with this exquisite, loving tenderness. He held onto her tightly, and thought that when Neld had him he would have this to remember. He would save it for the worst times; he thought in his innocence, that this would blot out any pain that Neld could devise.

A loud, peremptory knock made Shanda raise her head, Zaryn's hands clenched in her jacket, in her flesh; she would find later that he had bruised her, but she was not aware of it now, "I'll never see you again." he wailed. "Never again. Never—"

"Zaryn, that's not true. I swear it. Let go now, let's get it over."

But he couldn't let go. In the end, she called to Neld to come in, and sat where she was, holding him. He hid his face in her shoulder and trembled.

"Very pretty," Neld sneered. "But now he's coming with me."

"Sit down, please." She waited, and after a moment Neld did. "He doesn't seem to want to go with you. And he pleases me. Will you sell him to me?"

Neld laughed. Sell Zaryn to this icy milksop who wouldn't have the faintest conception of how to enjoy him? Not likely. She let the laugh speak for her.

"You admired this." Shanda pulled off the clip and threw it spinning, sparkling, into Neld's lap. A thrill of triumph took her as the ugly red hands snatched at it.

"Not enough," Neld said shortly.

The earrings followed, and the bracelet, and the ring, one by one. "That's all. I don't have to give you those, you know. I could just take him, but I don't deal that way. Take it or leave it," she bluffed, and held her breath.

Neld took it.

She signed the bill of sale Abbott gave her and swaggered out, wearing the diamonds. Abbott collected the other women and herded them out after Shanda's thanks.

"It's all right," she told him. "You're free now." She stroked his hair and went on saying it until he drew a long breath and moved to look up into her face. He'd been so fiercely concentrated on those last few moments in her arms, expecting to be torn from her at any second, that he had not really heard what was going on. It was only now, as he looked at her, that he missed her lovely jewelry, that he knew what she had paid. He touched the place where the clip had been. "My lady gave *those* for *me?*"

"A small price for your life," she said shakily. Her arms tightened about him, her mouth took his. He lay still, tense for a moment in her arms, and then his whole body responded. *Zar, Zar, your gift is* sweet . . . How different this is *from Raoul's placid* acceptance *of my kiss. Raoul* —

She let go of him abruptly, thrust him away. Hurt and bewildering, he watched her face, so tender only a moment ago, so different now; and remembered what he must do. He came up on his knees and a extended his hands to her, palm up, crossed at the wrists. "I am Milady's willing slave for all my life. Her will is my will—"

Shouting in the corridor, running feet. "The ship's come! It's come! It's here!" Mary burst in. "Shanda, the ship's come! Hurry, they're in orbit now —"

"How long do we have?"

"I don't know. It's one of your ships, not 732, but another one. As long as you like, I suppose, why?"

"I'll need at least an hour. Start evacuating everyone else, we'll go on the last trip."

"We?"

"We." Shanda laughed, on a thin note that worried Mary. "I made a purchase too. I bought him, Mary. From Neld. For a handful of diamonds. I bought Zaryn—"

"Well, that's nice," Mary made her voice matter-of-fact. Zaryn still on his knees, his hands out toward Shanda, looked from one to the other, puzzled.

"Oh, get up," Shanda told him sharply. "You've got a lot to do in a little time, stop wasting it in foolishness—"

"Shanda!" Mary admonished.

"I'm sorry, Zaryn. I didn't mean to speak like that, I'm— wrought up. But you must choose some clothes to bring with you — you can't bring all your things — and say goodbye to your mother. Mary, get him a couple of guards, I don't trust that woman . . . I'll take you to your room to pack." She went out with him. Mary heard, "Bring that red velvet, and that silver, anyhow—and the green . . ."

In other words, everything she's seen you in so far, Mary thought, laughing, Here's the beginning of the end of Raoul, thank Sol. She ran to get the guards.

Shanda left Zaryn at his door and went to Chan, to tell her that Zaryn was safe and thank her for her hospitality.

It was a bad half hour. She found gratitude embarrassing, and Chan was aflame with it.

She got away as soon as she decently could, back to Zaryn's room. A guard opened the door for her. For a moment she thought that Neld had got him somehow after all. A small pile of clothes and a box lay upon his rug, mute evidence of his obedience, but he was not there. Then a curtain blew in a draught and she went through it into their temple.

A feeling that she had no right to be here kept her for the space of a breath in the doorway, staring.

The twenty-foot golden idol stood slender, sexless, beautiful, one hand raised as though in blessing, the other stretched down, palm up, accepting. His head was bent, as though the better to see his Gift, and the votive fire between the feet glittered in the emerald eyes— Zachariah's own emeralds? — giving an apparent life to the idol that was missing from the motionless figure below it. Zaryn knelt, gazing up into the face so like his own; their communion was silent, but she knew that to Zaryn it was very real. He was bidding his god farewell.

She must have made some small sound then, for he became aware of her presence and whirled up in fear, pressing himself against the altar. He saw that it was she, and came to her. "I'm ready, Milady."

She held out a hand; he took it and followed her, only pausing for

a moment at the curtain for one last, long look. Zar's eyes seemed to follow him. Zaryn raised a hand, let it drop, and the curtain fell behind him.

Shanda had meant to leave him alone with his mother, but it was too cold in the corridor. She had to go in, but she stayed near the door, not watching them, and trying not to listen. She gave them every moment she could, but at last one of the woman tapped softly on the door. "Everyone is aboard, Milady," she reported as Shanda opened it a crack.

"All right." She went to them, Zaryn lay in his mother's arms, his head on her shoulder, as he had when he was little. They clung together tightly. "It's not forever, she told Chan. "You can come to visit him, and he can come to visit you. On any ore ship, any time. You'll see each other again. And now we must go, they're waiting for us." Zaryn stood up then, and looked down at his mother, and bent to kiss her once more before he went from her room, from her palace where he had spent his life, from her world no Zaryn had ever left before.

IV

On the ship they learned that 732 had been attacked and destroyed with all hands, but that it had got a message off before it died, telling where its owner was. This ship, 989, had been the nearest and had turned off its homeward course to pick them up.

Reams of messages waited for Shanda. She and Abbott retired to the captain's hastily vacated cabin and plunged into work. The communicator hummed and chattered with business and with joyful congratulations.

Zaryn was safe now; her obligation to him fulfilled for the time being, she hardly remembered his existence.

The older women of the crew, with grown children of their own, were enchanted by this pretty child, and petted him and told him stories, true and untrue, and answered his questions and fed him candy. He had never heard of candy, and loved it. The younger ones caught him in dark corners and kissed him, and teased him and told him how beautiful he was, and he thought no one, anywhere, could be as kind as Terrans.

Only two things marred his happiness. Several overhead remarks told him that, for some reason he didn't understand, he was not going to be much approved of. Not because of himself, but because Shanda was bringing him home with her. Mention of her father, who seemed to have charge of her house and to have other powers strange to

Zaryn, filled him with foreboding. Her father was not going to approve either, apparently. If only he could have asked her about it, but he couldn't, he hardly saw her now. This was the chief cause of his grief.

Soon, too soon, they landed on Terra. It was green, as she had told him, and warm, and the sky so blue, and you could see the sun—it was like that country promised to the good when they died. Like Zara before the Catastrophe.

And then they were at Shanda's house, a palace, white stone and sweeping lines and grace and beauty. They went up a long flight of stone steps, and as they reached the top the door opened and a tall old man came out and caught Shanda in his arms. "My little girl — you're safe, you're all right."

She hugged and kissed him. "Yes — I'm sorry you had to be worried. You got my message? I sent it off first thing—"

"Yes, That was good of you, Shanda, I was frantic —" Here his eye fell on Zaryn, who quaked. "What on Earth—"

Shanda held a hand of each. "This is Prince Zaryn." She grinned as he jumped. "He has come to visit us. I'll tell you all about him later. Zaryn, this is my father, Lord Raymond."

Lord Raymond smiled and extended a gracious hand. Zaryn knelt and kissed it.

If he had planned it for a month, he could have done nothing more fortunate. Lord Raymond, completely melted, drew him to his feet and kissed his cheek. "Welcome to Earth, Milord, and to my daughter's house." Zaryn, who had never even heard the term *Milord*, cast a pleading glance at Shanda and answered faintly, "I thank Milord," stumbling a little over the word.

"Why are we all standing about out here?" Lord Raymond complained, to break the momentary awkwardness. "Come in, my dear, I'll show you to your room, and find you something cooler to wear —if I can," eyeing Zaryn's proportions uneasily. He, too, cast a look at Shanda that asked for instructions; her nod sent him on with Zaryn, forgiving him this time the ritual of greeting due the mistress of the house.

It was not until the quiet hour before dinner that Lord Raymond was able to escape to his daughter's room. She had bathed and changed to a filmy white gown; Terran women still wore skirts, long and full, at home and on formal ocsasions, an ancient, pretty relic of the dim past. Lord Raymond thought she was lovely in it; Zaryn would think so too.

Lord Raymond sat down now,

opposite his daughter, and looked at her without speaking. "Do you mind," he asked at last, his voice studiously emotionless, "telling me what this is all about."

Her lips twitched; he saw a flash in her eyes that gave him caution. "Can you really be thinking that he's my lover?"

He looked at her again and was contrite. "No. *I* don't, really, but other people will, you know."

That expressive eyebrow shot up. "While you are in my house?"

He bowed his head gravely. "Thank you. We'll hope that my — reputation for rectitude is as powerful as you seem to think."

"I'm sure it is," she replied gently, and he was absurdly pleased. Shanda always observed the polite rituals of respect and consideration that were his due as her father, but he sometimes felt uncomfortably that she was laughing at him, that deep down she found him negligible. Out of his pleasure he smiled affectionately.

Shanda, obscurely touched by that smile, told him about Zaryn. "I simply could not leave him there. Dad, he expected to die in a year — five and a half of our years. And he was glad it would only last that long! But what am I going to do with him? He's so damned innocent and helpless. I told you he'd never been out of the palace, didn't I? And then I drag him off here, where everything's so different from anything he's ever known, where he won't have the least idea how to be behave, or how to take anything that comes along, or what is expected of him. I've told him over and over that he's free, but he doesn't believe it. That's plain, as far as he's concerned. Neld owned him, and Neld sold him to me, and now I own him. It's awful. But he simply cannot conceive not being owned by somebody, he's only glad it's me instead of her. His grateful devotions is touching, and it's going to drive me mad." She had got up and was pacing the floor. She had planned to pretend to ask her father's advice about Zaryn in order to placate him, but now she discovered that she really needed it. She sat down beside him and put a hand on his arm.

He flushed a little; she didn't do that often. "Dad, tell me, what am I going to do with him?"

He stroked the beloved hand lightly. "The first thing, of course, is to prevent the scandal this could cause. Sol and Lune! Your friends are going to take one look at him and —"

"Yes, I know," she said meekly.

"I think our best course is the bold one. Zaryn is our guest— the son of Chanzar. He came to see a little of what's outside . . . we can play down his state of slavery, I think . . . I'll take him about with

me, and we'll give a dinner in a few days —"

"Then we'll have to work fast. You don't understand what his life has been like. He has never dined in public, males are simply ignored on Zara. I doubt that he ever dined with a woman since he was out of the nursery. You'll have to teach him."

"I will. And get him some clothes." He paused and searched her face. "You mentioned his grateful devotion to you. You do know it's more than that, don't you? He loves you—"

She moved away impatiently. "Of course he does. He'd love anyone who rescued him from that. When he's been here a while, and been around a little, he'll get over it." And after a long silence, her voice willing him to agree, "Won't he?"

"No. He won't get over it."

She whirled on him. "That's nonsense! Of course he will. Every woman on Earth will buzz around him like— like flies around a honeypot. He'll fall in love with one of them. I'll give my hearty consent, if she's decent, and that will be that. And now I must dress."

Lord Raymond turned at the door. "One little item of news. Our Lady Helena has been making good time with your Raoul while you were gone."

"Helena! With poor Julian's ashes hardly cold?" But her father had gone.

Shanda and her father and Zaryn dined together. Zaryn was uneasy at first, but did what they did, and no one yelled at him or laughed at him, and he grew calmer. He knew that all he would have to learn would be hard for him, especially at first; but he had determined to do the best he could and not disgrace his lady. It was all so confusing — he began to listen as Shanda and Lord Raymond talked.

Shanda was getting to the bottom of this business about Helena and Raoul.

"Now, really, Dad, you can't just tell me something like that and leave it there. I'll have to see Raoul tomorrow night at the latest, and I want to know what's going on."

"You've plenty of time to find out," he told her, not raising his eyes from his soupspoon. "Raoul's gone on a tour of the Galaxy. Left day before yesterday." He was getting old, and enjoyed administering little shocks to the young. Especially to his imperturable daughter.

She eyed him calmly. "And what brought that on?"

"Lady Helena, I believe. As you pointed out, her husband's ashes have hardly—er—cooled yet. And you were hardly out of the atmosphere when she was lallygagging after him. I believe it shocked

him."

"It would," Shanda nodded, the beginning of a smile playing about her lips.

Lord Raymond nodded too. "Young prude," he said dispassionately.

Shanda, amused, administered a gentle reproof. "Because he is shocked by the same thing you are, you call him a prude?"

"I do. He is young. It is natural for the young to protest against the code of behavior laid down by their elders, not to enforce it even more stringently than their elders do, or want to. Anyone of Raoul's age who behaves as he does is a prude. There is no other word for it."

"Father," Shanda said gravely, "you are speaking of the man I hope to marry."

Her father made a rude sound, and refrained from glancing at Zaryn. "And you still persisting in that madness?"

"I am," she replied grimly, and he did not pursue the subject.

"When do you see Her Majesty? he asked instead.

"Tomorrow at ten."

"I hope that your report of the new planet is favorable."

"It is."

"It would be." He sighed. "Sometimes I almost wish someone would give you a real set-down some day. It would be so good for you."

"It would be very bad for me. And worse, in the long run, for the person who did it," she added reflectively.

Her father sighed again. "Yes, I suppose it would."

Zaryn was horrified. He had never heard a man talk that way to a woman in his life. True, there were points beyond which he dared not go, that was plain; but Zaryn could not repress a feeling of shock that she had not simply struck him down at that first remark. She had been obviously displeased. How kind she was.

They finished their soup in silence.

Shanda drew Zaryn into the conversation when the next course had been served. "You remember Mary? The one who was always asking questions?"

"Oh, yes. She was very kind to me."

"I was talking to her, just before dinner. Would you let her talk to you some more? About Zara? There are a thousand things she wants to know about your people. And she'd like to see you again."

"Oh, yes—" he stopped. "If Milady approves."

Shanda cast a glance at her father that said, "You see?" And then smiled at Zaryn. "Why should I object? It's up to you, entirely." Her voice became very gentle. "And you needn't answer anything you

don't want to. Remember that. No one here can make you do anything you don't like."

"Not entirely true," her father pointed out. "Don't confuse the child, Shanda. We all have to do things we don't like."

"The point I'm trying to get across to him," anger touched her voice, "is that things are different here. That he is not a slave, but a queen's son; that he does not have to answer questions, or allow any intrusion into his personal affairs unless he is perfectly willing, just because some woman gets nosy, or stand for anything else that he finds offensive. That until he feels able to be independent and take care of himself, he is under my protection, and I'll break anyone who offends him. And stop calling him a child—he's two years older than I am."

"Anger at meals is bad for the digestion," her father answered calmly, and rang his bell for the next course. "And to me, you're still a child, you know. And act like it, a good deal of the time."

That's done it, Zaryn thought. Now she would send him away, at least— but to his amazement, Shanda laughed.

"Right you are. Sorry, Dad. But Zaryn, you do understand, don't you?"

"Yes," he said, and believed it. What he really understood was just one thing: He belonged to Shanda, and she would break anyone who offended him. He was very proud; not even any other Zaryn had ever had a mistress like Shanda.

After dinner Shanda changed into something comfortable and went to work. Her desk was piled with reports and plans which only she could deal with. She lit a cigarette and got at it. At about the time her neck was beginning to get a crick in it, her father came in. She looked up, rather welcoming the interruption. "Where's Zaryn?"

"Prowling about your excellent library, uttering little cries of delight." He eyed her desk with distaste. "Can't you take just one night off?"

"I've had quite a few nights off from this. Sorry, it's quite necessary."

"You work too hard." His mind veered back to Zaryn, and he chuckled. "Did you see his face at dinner? What did he think you were going to do to me?"

"Hang you by the wrists for an hour or two, I suspect. That's a favorite punishment where he comes from, for impertinent men. Gives them time and leisure to repent of their sins."

"It would." He seemed about to speak again, saw that she had picked up her pen and become very patient, sighed, and wandered back to the library to introduce Zaryn

to three-dimensional, full-color television.

"With the exact promptness of courtesy, Shanda entered the office of Renee, Empress of the Galactic Empire, as Renee's desk whispered "Ten o'clock. The Lady Shanda." like an announcement.

"Shanda!" Renee extended a friendly hand, squeezed Shanda's firmly. "You don't know how glad I am to see you, how glad I was to hear that you were safe."

"Why, thank you!" Startled by this unexpected warmth, Shanda, for once, couldn't think what to say next.

Renee smiled. "You're very valuable to me, Shanda. I wouldn't know how to get along without you," she added gently. "Tell me all about what happened."

Shanda returned the smile and gave a brief account of the attack, and of Zara. "I found something interesting there," she finished.

Renee, waiting, regarded her with some exasperation. Didn't the girl ever stop working? Even in the middle of a shipwreck she went exploring, she'd probably die with a pen in her hand. She was going to be the next minister. Renee wished she could tell her that; it bothered her to watch Shanda working so hard for something that was already hers. Worrying about Helena — *Helena!* That dilettante upstart! She only owned GalCom through her marriage to Julian, and left the work of it to others while she gallivanted about the Galaxy. Renee nearly-snorted, jerked her mind back to say. "What?"

"Tungsten," Shanda answered simply, and sat back to watch the effect. "Tons and tons of almost pure ore. Enough for centuries, enough for thousands of years. Enough for all the steel we want."

"Stop! Give me time to get this. I'm stunned—"

It was Shanda's turn to wait while Renee absorbed the news. She felt encouraged. Not only the tungsten, but she was valuable to Renee. She thought that Renee smiled upon her suit for Raoul, although she had never asked her, yet. Soon, now —

"Can we get it?" Foolish question, Renee thought. Shanda got what she wanted.

That she might mean, Can you get the rights to it, did not occur to Shanda, "Oh, yes. It's relatively near the surface, fairly good surrounding topography. Plenty of room for a spaceport." She went on discussing technicalities. Renee congratulated her suitably when she had finished, glanced at the clock, and began to talk about the attack.

"No, I didn't see the ship myself. Nor did anyone, for long—our gunner destroyed it. By the way, I want to recommend a medal for her, and that her family be pen-

sioned."

Renee nodded, made a note. Shanda owned and ran the company and the ships, but still they came under Empire administration. Crews wore the Badge of Empire and bore Imperial rank, and pensions and medals were government responsibility. It was hard, sometimes, to tell where the company left off and government began.

"Drac said something that gave me an idea. Has Helena checked her people thoroughly? Because it looks very much as if they know who is travelling on what ships, or what freighters are carrying. And they have to get the news out somehow."

Renee nodded again. "Oh, I agree. They do. You'll miss Patricia, won't you? So will I."

"So will her husband. They just got their baby, you know. Just before she went on that trip."

"I didn't know; it's a shame." She glanced at the clock again. "You said that while you were on Zara you had a lot of time to think, and that you thought you'd got something."

"Yes. It may not be anything new; it was new to me." She began to explain. About the people who disappeared: key people. About slants on news, playing up any injustice, real or imagined, and any industrial accident, real or arranged about editorials and commentators, who defended saboteurs and subversives, crying "witch hunt;" plays on stage and TV that were either sickeningly, platitudinously patriotic or, the other extreme, the Creature vs. Government or Aristocrat. And that she thought it was time all departments went to work on it, not just Security.

And what Petra had told her just before the attack.

Renee had nodded agreement, point by point, as Shanda talked. Now she sat up and questioned her sharply. Where had Petra had these experiences? What were the names of the beings involved? And when Shanda didn't know these details, Where was Petra now? Waiting for a new ship? Good. Renee would see her as soon as possible. Would Shanda ask her to think about it, and — she rapidly outlined what she would want to know.

Shanda felt herself dismissed. "I hope Raoul is well?" she asked as she rose, remembering that she had not even thought of him, let alone asked.

"Quite well. He ran away from your friend Helena, I think. That reminds me. I hear you brought home a guest from Zara."

"Yes." Shanda laughed uneasily, wondering what Renee had heard. She took a deep breath and told her all about Zaryn.

"Poor child," Renee said when

she had finished. "I'm anxious to see him. Is he as beautiful as they say?"

"More so," Shanda grinned. "No words can do him justice, he has to be seen to be believed. And then you're not sure you believe it."

"I can't wait," Renee said truthfully, and gave Shanda her hand. Shanda, on impulse, asked permission to do a little quiet investigating of her own through her far-flung offices, got it, bowed over the hand, and departed.

Home again, she plunged into her loaded desk in earnest. She read noted, signed, revamped, and cast aside. And laid certain reports in a separate pile to be gone over again later, together.

At the end of a long two days she had reached the end. She sighed and picked up the pile, which had grown to surprising proportions, wondering if she was getting too suspicious or if the thing was really this widespread. As she began to sort as to location, she found that the small, troublesome things were happening all over the Galaxy. Not just here and there, but all over. Each taken by itself was nothing; all together they added up to a very disturbing sum.

Shanda wrote a letter to certain of her employees, as scattered over the Galaxy as the plot seemed to be, people she'd known all her life and knew she could trust, asking them for certain information. Information about schools, and organizations for young creatures, and program directors for TV networks.

V

The next few months passed swiftly.

Lord Raymond took Zaryn shopping, and calling, and to afternoon parties with other gentlemen of his acquaintance; encouraged and applauded his dancing; and learned to love him like a son. He was amused by his naivete, touched by his deference and confidence, and charmed by his unfailing good temper. Comparisons of Zaryn and Rauol were inevitable, and never to the latter's advantage.

Father and daughter together took Zaryn in hand during his first week and drummed the rules of correct social behavior on Terra into him. They impressed him with the fact that he was a prince and an honored guest, and tried to teach him to call Shanda by her name. The nearest they got to that was Milady Shanda, which worked out very well; his unusual little formalities with women were to prove to be enchanting.:

Shanda, reflecting grimly that Raoul's absence certainly was making everything a good deal simpler just now, took Zaryn to dinners and balls and parties. He was a

sensation.

The flies gathered round the honeypot, as she had predicted, and nearly frightened it into fits. They came in groups and cornered him, smothered him with invitations to dance and to their own parties, sent him little presents, and called in droves. She might as well have kept her emeralds; inevitably, everyone gave him emeralds. But she noticed, divided between amusement and annoyance, that he always wore one piece that she had given him.

Renee herself set the seal upon his respectability, not by inviting him to a ball she was giving, but by giving a ball in his honor. Shanda and Lord Raymond breathed almost audible sighs of relief and sat back to let nature take its course. Their house became the wine-merchants' delight, and two of the servants quit.

Zaryn was confused and bewildered and frightened and desperately unhappy. He hardly saw Shanda any more at all. A few minutes in the car to or from a party, during which she was concentrating on whom she wanted to see and what she wanted to tell them or learn from them or what she had learned, an occasional dinner *en famille* after which she retired to her office and work; with anywhere from eight to twenty-eight other people at her own table. Never, never alone any more. Occasionally she remembered to smile at him and compliment him upon his appearance and behavior, but she never touched him; the easy friendly affection with which she had treated him on Zara had gone entirely. It was all he asked for; more he had learned on that first night not to expect.

All danger of scandal over and out of her mind, the knowledge of his popularity firmly fixed there, Shanda hardly thought of him. She was busy, as always, with her own work, to which was now added the fight against the unknown, unseen, untouched enemy.

She was the head of the Galactic Minerals Company; more accurately, she *was* the company. Her great-grandmother had been the Minerals Importing Co.; her grandmother had amalgamated with three rivals, retaining control; her mother had flung it like a net across the Galaxy, and Shanda had made it a power to be reckoned with. An economic power, and a political one.

Her father watched her with even more exasperation than her absorption usually engendered in him. She had been their only daughter, and raised by her mother almost from the cradle to her job. She had cut her teeth on ore samples, and could identify granite and magnetite and hematite and

blue earth and bauxite and their brothers and sisters almost before she could identify a table or a chair or a doll. He had come nearer than he ever had to arguing with her mother when she let Shanda sit in on conferences at the age of ten. Until all hours of the night . . then her mother had been killed in that accident somewhere in space, out on the far rim of the Galaxy, the cause of which they had never known, and Shanda, at the unheard-of age of twenty-five, had taken control of the company. She had had to work hard at first, and she had never stopped.

He had wandered into her office and sat looking at her with that faint worry that always possessed him these days when he watched her working. When he spoke she did not so much as look up. "You work too hard. You work all the time—you're too young. You ought to be out playing, dancing, making love—"

"Love's not for me," she interrupted harshly. Still she did not look up, but her busy pen was still. "You love someone, and then they are taken from you or go from you or never even see you at all. . . ."

"Who never saw you?"

She made no answer. Her eyes were still on the paper under her hand, but he thought that she didn't see it. She was seeing something else, out of the past . . .he looked too. And saw, now, a lot of things he hadn't really looked at at the time, things that he had not added together to their answer — he stood up and leaned toward her over the desk. "Julian! *not Julian!*"

"Yes. Julian." Her answer came so low that he had to strain to hear it. After a long time her eyes met his, and the look in them shook him. His poor child—if only she had been handsomer, could have been gayer, free of all this responsibility, able to devote her whole time to courting him as Helena had —

"It was a long time ago," she was saying, without truth. "I was cured, long before he died. Work cured me— when he died I was fond of him, nothing more. Work is the thing to stick to, and to love. Work, and the thing you can build with your own brain and thought and planning. If you have that, nothing can touch you, nothing can hurt you. Work and power, power so that no one can touch you or hurt you or take from you what you have."

He made a wordless sound of compassion. "I know, my darling, I know. It hurts so much, to give all your love and get nothing in return . . . I loved your mother with all my being. She came to my world to see my mother, and I had never seen anyone so wonderful . . when my mother said I was to marry her

I was delirious with joy. I could hardly wait until she came back for the wedding, I was so happy as we went away together. I didn't know I'd never see my world again — I didn't know I'd ever want to. But I did, in a year I was desperate to go home. Because she didn't love me, you see. She never loved me. She was kind and generous and gave me everything I wanted, except that. She was gone so much, and she wouldn't take me along, even when she was going to stop at my home she wouldn't take me. She said she's be busy, I'd be bored, in the way, she wouldn't have time to take me about. As if I'd have cared, I'd have been with her —"

Shanda had come and put her arms around him. "I'm sorry, I didn't know. Would you like to go home now? To visit?"

"No. It's been too long. There's nothing there now that I ever knew. I don't want to go back anymore."

"She did love you, you're wrong about that. We missed you when she was away. She used to talk about you and wonder what you were doing then, that minute. We'd try to figure out if it was night here, or day, what time it was, and wonder what you and the boys were doing. She did love you."

He shook his head. "No. She was fond of me, I think. She didn't love me. She didn't love anyone but you; she never really thought of anyone else."

Shanda was silent. She knew, all at once, that that was true. Her mother had never considered Raymond's feelings or desires in any matter, if they conflicted with her own. She was carelessly kind, carelessly generous. He pleased her in a thousand ways, but he had not touched her heart. The game of "What are they doing now at home," she saw, was played for Shanda's amusement alone, a way to lull a small girl, bored with long confinement in a space ship, into sleep. "I love you," she said, and thought that it was poor consolation.

But his arms tightened. "My little girl. I know you do. I'm happy, Shanda, and very proud of you. And love you. I want you to be happy too . . ."

"I am, Dad. I will be. You'll see. I'm going to get what I want—"

He sighed and got up. He knew what she wanted, and agreed with her, she would probably get it. Raoul, and the ministery. Neither would keep her warm in bed on a cold night — he nearly said it, bit it back just in time. Shanda never appreciated coarseness, he didn't himself; he wondered at himself for having so nearly said it.

"Yes, I expect you will. Good night, my dear, Im tired. I'm going to bed." He kissed her and went

away. He hadn't accomplished what he had set out to do at all, he thought. Just the opposition, bursting out like that about his own old unhappiness, convincing his icy child more than ever that love was a waste of time a mistake . . . when he had meant to convince her that only love could make you happy, really in the final analysis.

And worse, he had gone in the first place to speak to her about Zaryn, and had forgotten all about him. Poor unhappy Zaryn.

Shanda forgot Lord Raymond and their conversation as the door closed behind him and her eye fell upon the paper in her hand. For now, at last, she knew all that she wanted to know, with one single, vital exception. Or two.

Her first real information had been gathered and submitted to Renee, and Renee had called a meeting of all the ministers. A meeting at which Shanda had been appointed director of the investigation to be made by all ministries cooperatively.

It had been difficult. Their own spies were killed almost as soon as planted, telling them that the opposition's spy system was perfect, or as near as made no difference. Questioning of known revolutionaries came to nothing. To nothing, literally, because they learned that a hypnotic block had been set in each of them that wiped out all knowledge instantly on the beginning of questioning by hypnosis or other means. So that by the time you began to question one of them, the creature literally and honestly knew nothing whatever that you needed to know.

In spite of this, by patient digging, they had learned the identity of every last one of them, and carefully left them free and unmolested and working. But watched. Every last one of them, except the woman behind the whole thing. And her spy in the government, if she had one. If she didn't have one, it was someone in such a high position that knew everything herself.

One of the ministers. But even so, the spy was necessary, she saw. For, actually, only she and Renee knew everything.

Renee would not be plotting against herself, and she, Shanda, was not the one.

A minister, then, and a spy. For no minister would dare, at this stage, to risk being caught examining certain papers that must have been seen, or overhearing certain conversations between herself and Renee that must have been overheard.

Her clock warned her gently that it was time to go and dress, she had a date with Raoul.

"Blast Raoul," she muttered, stilling the clock's insistent voice.

Why couldn't he have stayed away for a while? He had come home a month ago, just when she was busiest, saying with a yawn that since the tour had been a bore, he'd cut it short. And demanding her and attention when she had very little of it to spare. Secretaries could send flowers and candy and the all-important birthday present that must outshine Helena's, but secretaries couldn't keep dates for you. She was beginning to dislike Raoul instead of being merely indifferent to him. She'd have to watch that, if it showed . . . she mustn't let it show. Poor Raoul, it wasn't his fault he was the Empress' son and necessary to her ambitions. But it was his fault he was so dull. So dull that you forgot he was there, a good deal of the time. She had had to watch that. She had a tendency to leave a meeting or a conference with his mother, forgetting to say anything to him at all, forgetting he was present at all, forgetting he was alive or ever had been. And then he'd be in a pet for days, it took all she knew to get him out of it. She'd bet Helena never forgot, Helena wasn't the type to forget. There was another meeting tomorrow evening; her mind reverted to it, and to what she had to lay before it and to the private talk she was going to have at dinner with Renee before it began.

Lord Raymond did not need the low chime sounding throughout the house, announcing its mistress' imminent arrival, to bring him to the door to welcome her the next afternoon; he was already there, ushering out a caller. Politely, as always, she saw as she came up the steps, but a little stiffly. The woman's back was to her; then she turned, and Shanda saw that it was Helena.

A bit surprised, she returned Helena's greeting, irked as always by the malicious amusement behind her smile. It seemed even stronger today. Blast the woman, what was she up to now? She stood beside her father, watching Helena go unhurriedly to her waiting groundcar. Her "what's she doing here?" interrupted his ritual of welcome. He sighed. No use to try to soft-pedal it.

"Calling on Zaryn."

She whirled on him. "What does she want with him? Does he like her? I won't have it —"

Her father shrugged. "I don't know. To both questions. He seemed upset just now; I haven't had an opportunity to find out why."

"Do it now. And then come and tell me at once."

But it was not until she had finished dressing carefully for her dinner with Renee that he came into her room. She dismissed her maid.

"Well?"

"I think you'd better let him tell you himself. It—isn't nice." As he spoke, Zaryn came in. She thought he had been crying, but with him could never tell. She held out a hand to him, and he came straight to kneel beside her; she'd never been able to break him of that, and had stopped trying. He held onto her hand tightly and waited for her to speak.

Shanda glanced at her father, watching them gravely, and back to Zaryn. She smiled and asked gently, "What happened, Zaryn? Tell me."

"I— she said something that troubled me. May I ask Milady something?"

He looked up into her face then, such distress in his that she pulled him into her arms, his head upon her breast.

"You know you may. What did she say?"

"She said — that Milady doesn't want me here. That I'm just an embarrassment — that she didn't see how I could stay where I wasn't wanted. I thought she meant I should begin dancing on the stage, as — as Milady has planned for me. But she said "Oh, that — if you want to, I suppose—but that she had a nicer plan for me. That she'd give me a house, all my own, and servants, and anything I wanted —"

Shanda held off a little, her hands hurting his shoulders. "*Helena* asked you to marry her?"

Zaryn returned her look, unhappy, but not answering. It was Lord Raymond who answered.

"No. Not to marry her." And in answer to her look, "I told you it wasn't nice."

"Was it true, what she said?" Zaryn shrank away from the blazing eyes she turned on him, and then was held close again.

"No. It wasn't true." *So sweet in her arms.* "Not true at all. What did you say to her, Zaryn?"

"I— nothing. I had to find out if it was true. She said she'd come back tonight for my answer to her proposal."

"All right, we've settled that. When she comes, you tell her that your answer to her—" he wondered why she laughed" *proposition* is no. Be sure to say 'proposition'— have you got that?" He nodded. "Forget about dancing for the present, until my marriage is settled. Then, unless you've found someone you want to marry, we'll find you a nice apartment and someone to live with you —"

Lord Raymond stood up. "You won't have to look far. We've planned that I'll come and live with him. I've got some money of my own, you know. And I don't think I want to live in Raoul's house. I'd much rather live with Zaryn, and he says he wants me."

Shanda let Zaryn go. "As you like," she said indifferently, and turned back to her mirror. She was furious, and then hurt, and then neither. She didn't blame her father. It must be bad enough, having another man come in and take over the house that has been yours for years, in any circumstances; but if you didn't like him, it would be unbearable. It was an excellent plan, really. And her father would take good care of Zaryn. In the mirror she watched them leave her room, her father's arm about Zaryn's shoulders. The fury turned on Helena. *She just can't keep her hands off anything that's. . mine.. Julian and the Ministry, and Raoul, and now Zaryn.*

Lord Raymond, walking down the hall, his arm still about Zaryn, had made up his mind at last; seeing Zaryn in Shanda's arms, Shanda's blazing eyes, had done it. He began to devise a plot of his own.

She came into the conference room a little ahead of Renee, who had stopped to speak to a latecomer.

"—you've got to admit Helena found Julian's death *convenient*, to say the least," someone was saying, and was instantly shushed.

Into the awkward silence, out of her own furn, Shanda said casually, "She probably killed him," and spread out her paper on the table for something to do. *Julian— your death* convenient — *Julian* . . . She closed her eyes in pain, missing Renee's sharp glance and thoughtful look, not knowing that Renee had heard at all.

But Renee had; and at the end of a conference made wearisome by the heated arguments and the open suspicion when once each realized that she was suspected by all the others, its only result that a trap should be planned by Renee for the culprit, she left orders that Julian's nurse should be brought to her the next day, and fell into an exhausted sleep.

And Shanda, absorbed in the plot and in fury against the absent Helena, who had suddenly gone off somewhere without warning after seeing Zaryn— a pleasing occurence — forgot again to say goodnight to Raoul when the meeting broke up.

But she redeemed herself the next evening, when Renee, sure of her, called her to help plan the trap. Raoul and his mother walked with her to the door. Renee dismissed the servant and affected an interest in the late summer sky that gave Shanda a chance to kiss the sulky mouth and coax a smile from it. It wasn't as hard as it had been sometimes; she wondered cooly as she kissed him goodnight, feigning a tenderness she was far from feeling, if his mother had ordered him to kiss and make up.

The thought encouraged her.

The trap failed. Was, in fact, simply ignored. Shanda and Renee had planted a bit of false and startling information at the next conference, information that should have been acted upon immediately it was received, whose results could be immediately traced. Then they had settled back to wait. They waited for two weeks, and nothing happened at all.

Helena came back, as unexpectedly as she had disappeared, was told the story, and laughed heartily until she caught Renee's cold stare.

Shanda went on a short business trip and came back to find the house in an uproar; her father was not even at the door to greet her. She found him in her study, furiously questioning a group of guards. He looked up as she came in, and went perfectly white..

"Dad, what is it?" She hurried to him, and he clung to her.

"It's Zaryn— he's gone. We can't find him anywhere. He was reading out in the garden this afternoon, I went out to join him. His book was lying in the grass, its leaves crumpled — you know how careful he is of books. I called the guards, we couldn't find him, we haven't found him. All we found was the guard at that part of the wall. He'd been knocked out."

He?

It was one of the three men she had hired last month, he explained. And, distraught, forgot himself. "I objected at the time, you remember. It's a good thing to give encouragement to men who try to work and be independent, but it can be carried too far. Men just aren't suited to things like guard work, it was a mistake —"

"All right. That's not the point. Go on about Zaryn."

But that was all about Zaryn. He had just disappeared.

Zaryn would not have recognized his kind, gentle, adored Shanda in the next hour. But she got nothing more than her father had. A guard near where Zaryn was heading, alone, had been knocked out. Zaryn was gone.

The men were discharged on the spot and the guards doubled at all points. Too late, too late.

The door chime sounded. Shanda stood absently watching the servant cross her line of vision on her way to answer it; heard her open the door, and her frightened call, "Milady —"

She was out of the study and across the hall in an instant, to see Zaryn laid unconscious on her doormat like— like something delivered, she thought, sickened.

As she knelt beside him, his eyes opened; when she touched him, he screamed and slid back into oblivion. It was then that she saw the

note pinned to his shirt. It was brief and to the point.

LAY OFF, OR YOUR
FATHER IS NEXT.

Lord Raymond, beside her, had seen too. He ignored it to give orders for moving Zaryn to his room, going himself to call the doctor before he came to wait with his daughter for the doctor's arrival and verdict.

She came after what seemed to be a week, went inside and stayed a year , and came out again, her professional calm somewhat ruffled.

"He'll be all right."

"What happened to him?"

"He was beaten— unmercifully."

"Beaten! but—"

"Oh, they didn't touch his face. But he's one solid bruise from shoulder to ankle. We'll have to keep him drugged until tomorrow; the nurse is giving it to him now."

"May I see him first? I— there's something I must say to him."

The doctor eyed her dispassionately. She'd heard that this woman was ruthless, but really, couldn't she wait one day to question him? "Perhaps I can tell you. He knows very little, really. He was sitting reading and then he was naked and bound and beaten. By four masked women. He has no idea who they were, and won't be able to identify them. Or the place where it happened. Or why it happened."

Shanda made an impatient distracted gesture. "Thank you. But that isn't what I wanted to say, Please, may I see him?"

It wouldn't do any actual harm. The doctor nodded and followed her into his room.

Shanda dropped down beside him, afraid to touch him. "Zaryn—" she called softly, and when he looked at her, "Zaryn, I'm sorry. I brought you here to be safe, didn't I? And told you no one could hurt you here. And then I let this happen to you—"

"It's all right. Milady, don't —" The long lashes drooped. Shanda turned to the doctor, frightened.

"It's just the drug," she reassured quickly, sorry she had misjudged Shanda. "We gave him the Healer," drily using the layman's term. "He can sit up tomorrow and get up the next day. But keep him quiet for a week or two. I've instructed the nurse, he'll know what I want done. I shouldn't need to see His Highness again." She brushed aside their thanks, replied cheerfully to their goodnights, and went away.

To Zaryn, the next day, it seemed as if his luck had turned against him for good. He had been so happy here, he thought in retrospect, forgetting his misery because Shanda ignored him. At least he was near her, and Terra was so lovely, and Lord Raymond so kind. And then he'd been beaten. And then Shanda had come in to

see him almost as soon as he woke this morning, pleased because she had a letter for him from his mother— every ore ship carried letters back and forth between them.

She had kissed him and asked how he was, and given him the letter, sitting on the edge of his bed while he read it.

And now he had read it. He lay with it in his hands for a moment, drew a deep breath, and gave it to her to read as he always did.

And waited, watching her face as she read, knowing what she was going to say.

His mother's earlier letters had mentioned, with puzzled amusement, how Ild had become friendly with Neld after he left, spending most of her time with her to the neglect of her own realm. "As if she's fascinated," Chan had written once. "None of us can make it out at all."

Now they knew.

Ild and Neld had sat drinking before the fire until late; a few sleepy slaves and a household guard or two were the only witnesses of what happened. They agreed that nothing had been said for some time. All at once Ild had looked from the fire to Neld and said slowly, "You sold him. You had him, and sold him away where none of us could even see him again. You sold him." And had stood up, swaying a little, and picked up the poker and brained Neld with it before any of them could move. And had killed the two guards, too, in defending herself, before the slaves' cries brought the rest of the warriors on a run. The first of these to enter had taken in the situation at a glance and had dispatched Ild with one stroke of her sword.

"Poor Ild," Chan wrote. "You would have been hers, of course, if Neld had not seen and demanded you, but none of us knew that she wanted you that much. But she has done a good deed for all of us: Neld's daughter has taken over, and she's very different from her mother. The mercenaries have already been disbanded, and she's negotiating treaties of friendship with the rest of us as fast as she can. So poor Ild brought peace to Zara. She would have liked that."

Shanda folded up the letter and very kindly, very gently let the ax fall, without having the least idea what she was doing to him. "Zaryn, I'm so glad for you! Now you can go home. And be safe. Poor Ild — my sweet, don't cry. Did you love her so much?"

"No— it's all right." He conquered the tears and smiled. She would only be unhappy if she knew how he felt about her, about leaving. He didn't want her to be unhappy. So he smiled and listened to the plans

she began to make about his going home, in a week or two, when he was well enough. So he would be safe. Because Terra had proved to be unsafe, after all.

And then one of the biggest government installations in the Galaxy blew up, spectacularly, one night. It was a gathering point for raw materials and a distribution point for finished products, and the loss in personnel was heavy and irreplaceable, and in money incalculable.

Shanda went at once, of course, taking from Zaryn his last precious time with her. And came back again, tired and irritable, only three days before he was scheduled to leave, and plunged directly, as always, into her piled-up desk.

Lord Raymond, frantic, cast about him for something, anything he could do to prevent this catastrophe. The only thing he could think of was so weak that it made him sick, but it was literally the only thing, so he did it.

Shanda had received, almost as soon as he got home, an invitation to dinner that night with Renee. And had confided to her father that she supposed she might as well ask for Raoul's hand tonight and get it over with; it wasn't a particularly good time, but there didn't seem to be going to be a better one in the near future, and she was tired of uncertainty.

So now, late in the afternoon, late enough so that it would be impossible to find a replacement, he bribed her maid to be suddenly sick, oh, much too sick to dress her mistress. And swore to stand any consequences himself if Shanda discovered the deception.

Shanda was fully as furious as he had known she would be. He set himself to soothe her, pointing out that one of the other servants could help her dress perfectly well.

"Of course," his daughter fairly spat at him. "Or I'm perfectly capable of dressing myself — I'm not so helpless. But my hair —"

"Oh, what a pity," he sympathized. "And tonight of all nights, when you want to look your best. We might be able to find someone, let me think who was it you were telling me did it better, anyway? No one on Earth I suppose—"

"Zaryn! Of course! He does do it better than she ever did, under his hands it lies exactly as it's meant to. Tell him for me, will you? Ask him to come when I ring. How lucky that he's still here!"

He expelled his breath in a long, soundless sigh. "Why, yes. I'll tell him at once." He hurried off to do so, and to try to persuade him to something.

Zaryn was more than willing to do his lady's hair once more, but Lord Raymond had a hard time persuading him to the rest of his

purpose. "It won't be any good," Zaryn kept objecting. "And I don't want to make her unhappy about me. It's better this way."

"And do you think she's going to be happy married to that — that —" for once words failed Lord Raymond entirely. "In a year she'll be miserable. Zaryn, you can't let her do it."

"Well, I'll try," he agreed at last, dubiously. "But it won't be any good."

They both thought of that first night, back on Zara, as he picked up the brush and went to work. As then, they smiled at each other in the mirror, but neither of them spoke. When he had finished he put down the brush and knelt beside her, leaning back against the dressing table, and watched her put the finishing touches to her face.

He thought that even she had never looked so beautiful. Her gown was the color of the summer midnight sky, its full skirt scattered with sparkling diamonds like stars, her creamy shoulders left bare, her head rising, he thought, like a golden flower from the calyx of the low neckline. She had bought him with diamonds. Neck and ears, wrist and hand glittered with them now. He had learned that she had so many diamonds.

He touched one of those on her skirt, and she looked at him. "Does my lady ask for Raoul tonight?"

"Yes." In ten minutes she must go, or she'd be late.

Carefully, as Lord Raymond had taught him, he looked up to meet her eyes, back down to the diamond under his finger. "And Milady will never touch me again?"

"No." And then it hit her. In a few hours, she would be engaged to Raoul, and, in honor, could never touch Zaryn again. In three days he was going home, and she would never see him again.

She caught him to her, his arms coming up around her neck, his body yielding, his hair so soft against her cheek, against her lips. His *"N'a'illiiin,"* the Zaryn cry of love and surrender, came to her like pain; to wring from her, "Give me— your pretty mouth— my darling." And he gave it.

Her clock whispered, "Time to go." And said it again, louder, and again, louder still. She tore herself from him and shut it off, and stood up, and went from him without looking at him again.

He dropped his head upon the bench. He had been right, it hadn't helped, they had only hurt her.

At the palace, Shanda received calmly the surprising news that Renee could not see her just yet, and followed the servant into the grand drawing room to wait, glad of the delay. She needed a little more time to get control of herself,

to rid her lips and body of the memory of Zaryn.

She was thankful when Raoul came in, apologetic, his mother was busy; she'd be free in a few minutes. He sat down beside her and smiled, unaware of the distaste she suddenly felt when she looked at him, at his colorless face and his soft body. A blazing moment of remembering Zaryn's lithe strength, his bright beauty, his sweetness, his loving response to her kiss — *That's not fair. I never kissed Raoul like that, why should he respond like that?* — she took him in her arms and kissed him as she had Zaryn.

He twisted away from her. "Well, really, Shanda." One hand smoothed his rumpled hair, the other straightened his shirt. He giggled, "What got into you? You never —" and met her narrowed, dispassionate look and stopped.

"Her majesty asks you to come up now," a servant said from the doorway.

"Thank you," Shanda said, with a feeling of release, and ran swiftly up the broad stairs and into Renee's room.

She leaned against the door. "Renee, I want to ask your approval of my marriage," she said abruptly, and stopped as Renee, already pale, want paler.

"To my son?" It was asked through such stiff lips that Shanda, frightened, dropped on her knees beside her.

"No— not your son. To Zaryn."

"Then you don't need my approval."

Shanda stood up again, feeling rebuffed, and lifted her head. "No, I don't. But I would have liked to have it"

"Shanda, my dear, of course you have it. I'm very glad. Forgive me." She held out a hand and Shanda came back to sit at her feet, worried, determined to get to the bottom of this.

She kissed the hand. "Of course. Something's happened. May I know what it is?"

"A lot has happened. A lot . . . all at once" She looked about her, as if searching for something that was not there. "There was something — about you — oh, yes." She smiled a poor but genuine effort. "Girda died late this afternoon. And I want to congratulate my new Minister," and she bent to kiss Shanda's cheek. "I've longed to tell you, but you understand, don't you? I couldn't—"

"Oh, yes, I know—thank you so much. Oh, Renee, I'm so *happy* —"

"Yes. I'm glad it's come out this way, I've been so worried— Shanda, you do love Zaryn, don't you?"

The irrelevant question sobered Shanda. She searched Renee's face, worrying again. "Yes. Very much. I'm sorry—"

"I'm glad. It makes the rest of what I have to tell you much easier. I know now who our traitor is. I found out this afternoon."

"Who?"

"Helena."

Shanda laughed. "You don't have to soften that to me, if I could have chosen, it would have been her. How did you find out?"

"That's the part that has worried me. Do you remember, one night not long ago, saying that she probably killed Julian?" Shanda nodded. "I heard you say it. I didn't really believe it, but I investigated. I didn't know how I was going to tell you. I knew you loved him. She did kill him. She poisoned him. She came home early one day, and sent the nurse out of the room. He wasn't happy about going, but what could he do? When he came back, Julian was dead. She confessed this afternoon . . . she gave him his medicine, with the poison in it. And took the glass back, and set it on the table, and kissed him. He died, Shanda, while she was kissing him — she's a *monster!*" Renee put a hand to her face.

"No," Shanda said slowly, and Renee looked at her. "No. It's the kindest thing she ever did —"

"Killing him? *Kind?*"

"No. But if she had to kill him, kissing him was kind. Didn't you ever see them together? See how much he loved her? If she was in the room, he saw no one else, saw nothing else. He died with her kiss on his lips, died thinking that she loved him." Shanda got up abruptly and moved away. This still hurt, in spite of Zaryn. She thought that she knew exactly how Ild had felt. Neld had had Zaryn, and had sold him. Helena had had Julian, and had killed him.

And had beaten Zaryn.

She came back to Renee. "Tell me the rest."

"It was about noon, today, that I was sure. I had Helena arrested and brought to me, and sent Drac and a couple of others to search her house for evidence. They didn't find it, but they found the proof of her treachery. When they had brought that back to me, she confessed to all of it.

"She had decided that it would be nicer if she ruled the Galaxy than if I ruled it. So she married Julian, to get control of GalCom. But he asked embarrassing questions, made inconvenient objections now and then. After all, it was still his, you know, under the new laws. So he became — inconvenient. And then her spy, her spy that was so vital to her plans, began to be jealous of Julian. She was having an affair with the spy, you see; that's how she got him to do it for her. That, and the promise of a planet of his own, to rule as he liked. But I don't think that was

the important thing. I think — he must have loved her — very much."

"She was beautiful. And charming." Already the past tense, for Helena. "Renee — *who?*"

"Raoul."

"Raoul . . . but I was just talking to him—"

"I know I just found that out, you see. Sent the servant to get you, and the guards — to — take— my son — at the same time."

"Oh, Renee, my dear. And I burst in with that —" She held Renee and let her cry. But it went on so long, and so violently . . . frightened, she called for the royal doctor, and they put Renee to bed and to sleep. Shanda stayed until she had gone to sleep. Her presence seemed to be a comfort, somehow. Poor Renee.

When she was sound asleep, Shanda left her to send for her daughters, who were planetary governors; and to give the order to round up the revolutionaries, and then waited to see if there would be anything else she could do.

Of course, Raoul. He was always there, so quiet and so colorless that you forgot him. How many times she'd had to beg forgiveness because she'd forgotten him; and she'd intended to marry him. No wonder the other women weren't aware of him. Always there, a little behind his mother, with a book or just staring off into space. Listening, and remembering, and telling Helena. Even if they had thought of him, he would have been above suspicion in all their minds. Renee's son could not be a traitor. Poor Renee.

When she saw that there was nothing more that she could do tonight, Shanda walked home; she was amazed to find that it was only midnight. What a night! How oddly everything had worked out— Zaryn had been a like catalyst. First the attack, so that they landed on Zara. And then Zaryn, and bringing him home to save him from Neld. And Helena's attempted seduction, and her own furious retort, that made Renee investigate Julian's death. And through that, the end of the plot. All because of Zaryn, really — Zaryn . . . She began to run.

Zaryn sat on the wide window seat watching for Zar to rise above the horizon. Some kind astronomer had pointed it out to him when he first came, such a tiny, dim pinprick in the sky, so far away. Soon, so soon, he would be back there, where Zar could hear his prayers. He had prayed so hard, and so vainly, that he had decided it was simply to far for Zar to hear. He wrapped his hands about the post between the wide-open casement windows and leaned his head against them.

He did not look up when his door

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opened behind him. Lord Raymond would understand, knew how he felt. He gasped as Shanda said, "Zaryn —" on an uncertain note he had never heard in her voice before.

Still he could not look up. "Did Her Majesty give her consent?"

"Yes." She sat down beside him; still he did not move. She was suddenly frightened. Perhaps she was wrong, perhaps he didn't love her, either. Or perhaps he had stopped . . . "Zaryn, I've been cruel to you, haven't I? I'm sorry —"

He did look up then. "No! My lady could not be cruel to me, I want only —"

"What I want. I remember." She thought of his oath of fealty, and how she had interrupted it. And thought of something else, too. Thought that when Neld was coming to take him, he had cried because he would never see her again, not because he was going to die in misery. "That's not what I want from you, Zaryn. I'm going to ask you something, and I don't want what you think I want to hear, I want the truth. Will you promise me that?"

"Yes, Milady. I promise."

"Zaryn, do you want to go home?"

After a long moment, "No." His head rested on his folded hands again, now, as if he couldn't bear to let her see his face.

She touched his shoulder. "Zaryn, do you love me?" He sobbed once, and was still. "Do you, Zaryn?"

"Yes. I love you."

"Zaryn sweet. I love you so much. Zaryn, will you marry me?"

Still hesitant, he turned to her a transfigured face. "Raoul?"

And she reached for him, laughing. "I didn't ask for Raoul. I asked for you. Will you, Zaryn, my darling?"

"Yes, my beloved, yes. I prayed so hard — I thought Zar couldn't hear me any more —"

Time enough tomorrow to tell him all that happened. She pulled him down into her arms, tight against her, and kissed him, and both of them forgot that there was anything else in the world, in the Galaxy.

Zar rose over the treetops and looked in at his Gift. And winked once, and drew a veil of cloud between them and he watching stars.

THE END

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THE HEART

By Theodore Sturgeon

In which we learn that love is not the exclusive property of beautiful young girls and handsome young men — it belongs to all; but then, so does hate,

I don't like to be poked repeatedly by a hard bony forefinger until I give my attention to its owner, particularly if said owner is a very persistent drunk who has been told to scram twice and still hasn't got the idea. But this drunk was a woman, and I couldn't bring myself to slug her, somehow.

"Please, mister," she droned. I pulled my sleeve out of her fingers. The movement was reflex, the involuntary recoil at the sight of a dead face.

She needed a drink; a fact that made little difference for me. So did I. But I had only enough change to take care of my own wants, and nobody ever had a chance to call me Sir Galahad. "What the hell do you want?"

She didn't like to be snapped at like that. She almost told me off; but the thought of a free drink made her change her mind. She had a bad case of the shakes. She said, "I want to talk to you, that's all."

"What about?"

"Somebody told me you write stuff. I got a story for you."

I sighed. Some day, maybe, I would be released from people who said a) "Where do you get your ideas?" and people who said b) "You want a story? My life would make the swellest —"

"Babe," I said, "I wouldn't put you on paper if you were Mata Hari. Go scare someone else with that phiz of yours, and leave me alone."

Her lips curled back wickedly from her teeth, and her eyes slitted; and then, with shocking suddenness, her face relaxed completely. She said, "I'd hate you if I wasn't afraid to hate anything ever again."

In that second I was deathly afraid of her, and that in itself was enough to get me interested. I

caught her shoulder as she turned away, held up two fingers to the barkeep, and steered her to a table. "That last crack of yours is worth a drink," I said.

She was grateful. "One drink," she said, "and I'm paid in full. In advance. You want the story?"

"No," I said, "But go ahead." She did.

I always kept pretty much to myself. I didn't have the looks that other women have, and to tell the truth, I got along fine without them. I had a fair enough job, slapping a typewriter for the county coroner, and I had a room big enough for me and a few thousand books. I ran to seed a little, I guess. Ah — never mind the build-up. There's a million like me, buried away in dusty little offices. We do our work and keep our mouths shut and nobody gives much of a damn about us, and we don't mind it.

Only something happened to me. I was coming out of the borough hall one afternoon when I ran into a man. He was thin and sallow, and when I bumped him he folded up, gasping like a fish. I caught him and held him up. He couldn't have weighed more than about ninety-four. He hung onto me for a minute and then he was all right. Grinned at me. Said. "Sorry, miss. I got used to a bad heart quite some time ago, but I wish it wouldn't get in other people's way."

I liked his attitude. A pump like that, and he wasn't crying any. "Keep your chin up that high and it won't get in anyone's way," I told him. He tipped his hat and went on, and I felt good about it all evening.

I met him a couple of days later, and we talked for a minute. His name was Bill Llanyn. Funny Welsh name. After a few weeks it didn't sound funny any more, I'd like to have had it for my own. Yes, it was that way. We had practically everything in common except that I have a constitution like a rhinoceros. Had then, anyway. He had a rotten little job as assistant curator in a two-for-a-nickel museum. Fed the snakes and tarantulas in the live-animal corner. He only got cigarette money out of it, but managed to eat on his wages because he couldn't smoke. I knocked together a supper one evening in my place. He went mad over my books. It was all I could do to pry him loose. Oh, the poor man! It used to take him ten minutes to get up the one flight of stairs to my room. No, he was no Tarzan.

But I — loved that little man.

That was something I thought I didn't know how to do. I — well, I'm not going to talk about it. I'm telling you a story: right? Well, it's not a love story. Mind if

I finish your drink, too? I —

Well, I wanted to marry him. You might think it would be a joke of a marriage. But God, all I wanted was to have him around, maybe even see him happy for once in his life. I knew I'd outlast him, but I didn't think about that. I wanted to marry him and be good to him and do things for him, and when he got his call, he wouldn't be all alone to face it.

It wasn't much to ask — oh yes — I had to do the asking. He wouldn't — but he wasn't having any. He sat on my armchair in front of the fire with an ivory-bound copy of Goethe in one hand, and held up his fingers one by one as he counted off his reasaons why not. He wasn't making enough money to support both of us. He was liable to drop dead any second. He was too much of a wreck for any woman to call husband. He said he loved me, but he loved me too much to hang himself around my neck. Said I should find myself a real live man to get married to. Then he got up, put on his hat, said, "I'll get out now. I never loved anyone before. I'm glad I do now. You won't see me again. I haven't got much longer to be around; I'd just as soon you never knew just when I check out. That's the only thing left in the world that I can do for you." Then he came over to me and said some more, and be damned to you; that's for me to remember and for you to think about. But after he left I never saw him again.

I tried to get back into the old routine of typing and books, but it was rough. I did a lot of reading, trying to forget about it, trying to forget Bill Llaynyn's wasted face. But everything I read seemed to be about him. Guess I picked the wrong stuff. Schopenhauer. Poe. Dante. Faulkner. My mind went round and round. I knew I'd feel better if I had something to hate.

Hate's a funny thing. I hope you don't ever know how -- how *big* it can be. Use it right, and it's the most totally destructive thing in the universe. When I realized that, my mind stopped going round and round in those small circles, and it began to drive straight ahead. I got it all clear in my mind. Listen now — let me tell you what happened when I got going.

I found something to hate. Bill Llanyn's heart — the ruined, inefficient organ that was keeping us apart. No one can ever know the crazy concentration I put into it. No one has ever lived to describe the *solidness* of hate when it begins to form into something real. I needed a miracle to make over Bill's heart, and in hate I had a power to work it. My hate reached a greatness that nothing could withstand. I knew it just as surely as a mur-

derer knows what he has done when he feels his knife sink into his victim's, flesh. But I was no murderer. Death wasn't my purpose. I wanted my hatred to reach into his heart, sear out what was bad and let him take care of the rest. I was doing what no one else has ever done — hating constructively. If I hadn't been so insanely anxious to put my idea to work, I would have remembered that hate can build nothing that is not evil, cause nothing that is not evil.

Yes, I failed. My boss came into the office one afternoon last week with a sheaf of morgue notes for me to type in triplicate and file away. Post mortems on stiffs that had been picked up during the last forty-eight hours. William Llanyn was there. Cause of death, heart failure. I stared at the notes for a long time. The coroner was standing looking out of the window. Noticed my typewriter stop without starting again, I guess. Without turning around, he said.

"If you're looking at those heart-failure notes, don't ask me if there isn't some more to it — pericarditis, mitral trouble, or anything. Just write 'heart failure.' "

I asked why. He said, "I'll tell you, but damned if I'll go on the record with a thing like that. The man didn't have any heart at all."

The woman got up and looked at the clock.

"Where you headed?" I asked.

"I'm catching a train out of here," she said. She went to the door. I said goodnight to her on the sidewalk. She went down toward the station. I headed uptown. When the police emergency wagon screamed by me a few minutes later I didn't have to go down to the tracks to see what had happened.

THE END

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★ ★ ★

REBORN TO VALOR

By
Lawrence Defoy

After three years of hell on Venus, Herendon was just a few steps from freedom. He had a ticket on the next ship to Earth, so who could blame him for celebrating a little? Or even more than a little? But the celebration quickly turned into a vicious game of hide-and-seek with death.

Illustrated by Lawrence

THE small inner voice of caution was drowning in alcohol; the weariness easing; the memory of those frightening nightmares becoming dim. The long, low, alder-beamed taproom of the Spaceport Inn, warmed by the crowd and hazed by smouldering peat in the fireplace, wavered gently before his eyes. The surf-sound of a score of conversations rose and fell, lulling him.

Young Herenden realized he had half a glow on, and he grinned. Okay, he told himself, *get* drunk—let down. Your job's over. No bumbling swamp-hog's in danger of blowing himself cloud-high, just because you're not there to "advise" him . . .

"So you're through, eh? Heading home?" The fat man, who had introduced himself as Keating, giggled womanishly and peered up through glasses as thick as bottle bottoms.

"Right." Herenden turned his broad, amiable, boy's face. "And when the *Galileo* out there blasts off at midnight, guesh who'll be the happies ' hairy-ears on board. What's the Orbists, slogan? 'Venus for the Venusians'? Man, they can have it!"

His blurring gaze went past his gross neighbor to the other Terran, whom Keating called Doc. That one was no joy to behold—a walking corpse, a spectre at the feast whose neck-cords stood out with every labored breath. The dead eyes, deep in their black, sunken pits, made Steve Herenden uneasy.

"Engineer, huh? How long do you boys get, now?"

He brought his attention back to the fat man. All three Earthmen, inferiors whose patronage was tolerted but not encouraged, were crowded together at the lower end of the bar.

"How long? Three yearsh, same's other technicians."

"Lucky. Office-workers get five. 'Course, missionary medics, like Doc here, sometimes spend a lifetime on Venus."

Herenden wasn't listening. "Three yearsh," he brooded. "Riding herd on muckers, taking abuse from warty strawbosses, trying to pound a few facts into their thick heads. 'Suggesting' strengthening this flume or re-facing that dam so they don't wash out a couple of mud villages at the first spring run-off. Three yearsh of smells, dampness ad mould lukewarm meals of *bneeba* —"

"Sh-shh . . . You really hate Veenies, don't you?"

"Hate?" He probed inwardly. "Why, no, not really. Not the commoners, anyway. They're so brainless it's pathetic, but they · always treated me kind enough; like a pet dog or horse. If only they weren't so damn' *cocky*. How you

gonna teach 'em . . ."

He was aware of the sudden stillness, and looked up. All heads were turned toward the door, which had just opened to admit a little, brown man. He stood there in smiling uncertainty, wisps of the night mist feathering from narrow shoulders, drops of condensed moisture beading his antenna-like ears.

In fact, the newcomer seemed on the verge of with-drawing when the crowd, acting almost unanimously, parted to leave a wide path to the center of the bar.

"Watch this," Keating giggled in his high voice.

"Vegan miner, isn't he?"

"Yeah. Must be a greenhorn."

One of the barmen, a stolid Venusian with cold, wideset eyes, leaned his three-fingered hands on the bar, waiting. The little Vegan spoke in a self-effacing murmur.

"Spiced *gota*," Keating repeated delightedly. "Say, nothing but the best for those moles, by Jupiter!"

In icy disdain, the bartender placed a brandy snifter and poured the potent sea-plum liqueur. He poured a scant measure, recapped the decanter and put it away with insulting finality. All warmth had gone out of the room as though drawn off by a vacuum pump. The silence was a crouching cat at a mousehole, licking its chops, Steve decided.

The Vegan laid a large exchange note on the lignum strip and picked up his glass. Probably in town this one evening, before disappearing forever into the hell of the polar radium stopes, he made a slight, placating gesture to those around him and drank.

Keating whispered, "Watch!" again.

Herenden sensed what was going to happen, and his insides coiled. He wanted to protest, to return the little man's *"Ave atque vale!"* He caught the gaunt doctor's eyes on him, studying him, almost burning into him in their intensity.

Not until the Vegan set down his glass did the barman move. Then he brought up from beneath the bar a pair of long-handled tongs. Nipping the snifter delicately by the rim, he flung it across the room into the fireplace.

Except for the crash, the silence held. The Vegan's brown, sad features seemed to come apart like a mask of dried clay. Without waiting for the change which might or might not be forthcoming, he turned and scuttled away into the dripping night.

All over the room arose that horrible croaking that passed for Venusian mirth, and slowly the conversations resumed. Herenden let out his breath carefully.

"Bet he won't come in here again," Keating chortled, his

breasts jiggling lewdly.

Steve stared at his half-forgotten drink. "No," he said coldly. "And for what it's worth, neither will I!"

The gabble was cut by the crash of a second glass in the fireplace. Faces swung toward the fire, blooming with the alcohol; then, with dawning outrage, toward the three Terrans.

Steve Herenden pushed away from the bar, hardly noting the startled look exchanged by his fellows. He had an impression they shrank back, dissociating themselves, as he strode for the door.

Rumbles of rage swelled around him. "Who is he?" "Stop him, the Galactist spy!" "Ill-mannered Terran, call the police." "Don't let him get away!"

A merchant in rich brocade and with a blunt, intolerant muzzle shouldered into him. "One moment, Earthian!" he rasped. "I want —"

Months of indoctrination peeled from Herenden in a split second; three years of resentment boiled over. His hard fist shot out and the Venusian staggered back. Tumult arose, feet trampled and hands clutched. He whirled and lashed out blindly in all directions, joyous with a release of long pent-up fury.

An avalanche of clumsy flesh poured down on him, bore him to the slate floor. Blows rained on him, pettish kicks from bowed, sinewy legs. Herenden, semi-conscious, was still gaily punching when two polite, efficient Martian cops broke in . . .

The gray morning light filled the courtroom with a dismal murk. On a dais in the center of the ampitheater a black-robed judge stood haranguing rows of faces which, in an Earth court, would belong to spectators. Here spectators were also jurors, as the judge on his dais also acted as prosecutor.

Steve Herenden crouched on all fours in the prisoner's coop, resting his aching head against the bars. He was as good as condemned, and he knew it. Even if he were allowed to make a defense, what excuse could he give? Attacking the person of a Supreme Being! He'd probably draw the maximum penalty, fifty Venusian years.

"Or thirty-three and a third Earth years," he groaned to himself. He was twenty-three now, that would make him . . . Oh, what was the use? Ten years was just about the limit for an outlander to escape fungus lungs, the inevitable Venus disease.

Might be better if they tried him as a Galactist spy, which wasn't at all improbable. These Orbism-inculcated spectators would sentence him to the shark pools, which would be quick anyway.

He stared at the dim faces in the lowest tier. Two of them were ban-

daged; the one above the brocade jerkin spotted with thin, watery blood, was the Venusian he had socked first. Headache and prospects notwithstanding, Herenden had to grin a little. That high-born, at least, had lost his attitude of superiority; he was glaring at the prisoner with an active and personal dislike.

The judge had ceased orating, and had his head bent to the thin lips of another Venusian, a big-barreled, long-legged brute in black and red tights. The judge nodded as the other talked, stroking his weedy beard. When the interrupter turned and left the court, the judge began speaking again, though no longer haranguingly.

"Engineer Herenden, Earthian, has been charged with wanton attack on several of his betters, destruction of valuable property and resisting detention in the City and Province of Venusburg. Will all accusers please rise and view the prisoner?"

There was no movement in the amphitheater. Herenden looked quickly at the bandaged men. Both of them were sitting tight.

"Accusers not in court? Case dismissed."

The judge hadn't waited at all; obviously he did not expect the trial to go on. Why? Steve tried to straighten in the cramped cage and his head hit the top bars. What was going on here anyway? Was this some of their so-called humor?

A lock clicked and the bars fell away. A Martian bailiff took his arm and helped him to stand. The judge had left his dais, but the bandaged men still eyed him, now, in frustrated fury. Whatever signal they had obeyed, they weren't in on this new development.

"This way," the bailiff said, and swung Herenden toward a doorway under the seats. Beyond was a flight of stone steps going down, and Steve held back.

"Wait. This is not the way out."

"It goes down to a courtyard. It is better that you do not leave by the main door just now. Court orders."

Herenden shrugged and went down the steps, warily. A door at the bottom swung outward and as he stepped through he found himself facing the big Venusian in black and red. Two Martian plain-clothesmen, armed with batons, flanked him.

"Internal Security Police," the Venusian said. "You will come with us."

Insecpos! Steve had heard rumors of this shadowy force, rumors not good. Any outlander who disappeared on Venus was whispered to have fallen into their hands. Innocent or guilty, no trace of them ever was found.

He whipped around to dash back

through the still-closing door— and fell writhing to the flagstones. His whole body knotted and throbbed in gigantic, screaming cramps. He himself didn't scream. He couldn't; his throat was paralyzed.

The Insecpos with the batons lifted him to his feet and turned him in the direction he'd been facing. The agony ran out of him like water down a drain, leaving him limp and shaking. He knew what had happened — he'd been *fixed,* probably by those bulb-ended swagger sticks. Every muscle, every nerve had been force-frozen. Moving was like catching his foot in a crack and twisting, magnified a thousand-fold.

"All right." He made a wry face. "I'll go quietly."

They took him, by roadmobile, to a low, shed-like warehouse deep in the slums. This proved to be a false front for a completely soundproofed core, a windowless, stone doored dungeon with medieval torture machines squatting under 22nd Century lights. The Insecpos, evidently, had unlimited funds for their unholy work.

The room into which Herenden was shoved was a kind of office-power plant. A huge transformer took up one end, suckling by cable something like a diving bell on a tripod. At the far end was a desk and several chairs, two with dangling straps; and an entire wall with banks of two-way visiscreens, each with its grilled speaker below it like an incredulous, O-ed mouth.

Herenden only half noticed these things; his attention was on the crowd present. Behind the desk and surrounded by flunkies sat a withered, palsied Venusian in the trappings of a marchand, the diamond encrusted aigrette in his lizard-skin toque trembling gently.

"Make him say! Make him say!" this ancient peer — whom Steve guessed to be the Marchand of Venusburg — was mumbling.

Beside him stood Keating, still wearing, but no longer looking so foolish in, his purple garb; his eyes behind the thick glasses were now as hard and light as titanium. And back in the corner, moving nothing but his deep-hollowed eyes and throat cords, sat Doc.

"Well, my friend! You very nearly had me fooled."

Herenden had felt a flare of hope, seeing his two bar acquaintances of the night before. It died a little with Keating's harsh, high-pitched words, but he tried anyway.

"Listen, Keating, I don't know what this is about, but I'm appealing to you as a fellow Terran. Call the Embassy."

The fat man jiggled around from behind the desk and hit Herenden in the face. The batoneers seized the engineer's arms as they came up and threw him into a chair,

strapping him down.

"Fellow Terran? None of that you slimy saboteur! Two whole years I've been looking for you, and it's only bull luck you didn't get clean away last night. But you're caught, now."

Herenden licked at the trickle of blood from his split lip. "So you're in this police set-up, are you? You and that damn corpse over there? I might have known. These Supreme Beings can't run their own mines or farms or businesses, how can they be expected to be their own spying cops?"

Keating backhanded the engineer viciously across the mouth, slamming his head against the back of the chair.

"Tough boy, eh? I'll soften you up, bucko!"

"Make him say," croaked the Venusian prince dully.

"Yes, my Marchand. I'll get a full confession. . . ." Keating faced Herenden again. "Come on, tough boy, be smart. Talk. What did you plant in your dives behind the Ganl Dam?"

Whatever line of questioning the engineer had been expecting, this was so far-fetched his jaw dropped in unsimulated astonishment. Across the room Doc made a slight movement.

"Dives? Are you nuts? Why should I make dives at Ganl or any other dam? Your *masters* happen to be amphibious."

"Ever wear a Stapleton suit?"

A Stapleton suit is a thin plastic coverall with a regenerating bubble in the headpiece, good for shallow water work. Naturally, as a hydro-construction engineer Herenden had been trained in its use at school, but he decided not to admit that.

"What's this all about, Keating? My equipment was cleared at Sandia Construction Center, and they know Stapleton diving suits are outlawed on Venus. Among other useful items."

Keating sneered in triumph. At his signal, one of the stave-armed Martians brought over a suitcase and dropped it on the desk. "This is your bag, isn't it?"

Steve Herenden furrowed his brow. It was his bag, no doubt about that. But what were they hoping to prove?

"And your stuff in it?" The fat man probed expertly among the packed garments. "Your jacket, Herenden?" He held it up, fingering a ragged tear in the sleeve. "What caused this?"

Steve shook his head. "I don't know. I noticed it yesterday morning, when I was packing."

"Want me to refresh your memory? At three o'clock yesterday morning some unauthorized visitor was gaffed by the gate-keeper up at Ganl Dam. Through a Stapleton suit."

"What? I was nowhere near —"

The fat man was wrenching at the lid of the suitcase. It split in two, and between the layers was a diving suit, thin as a fold of tissue paper. "Aha!" he exclaimed in great surprise.

"That's not mine," Herenden said. "It's a plant!"

"I figured you'd claim that." Keating turned to the black-and-red clad Venusian. "The witnesses ready, Captain Trug?"

The Venusian nodded superciliously, not moving.

"Well, tune them in — " He fought down impatience. "That is, I suggest you tune them in, honored colleague."

The captain glowered, spat in contempt and turned to fumble uncertainly on the control panel behind him.

While the rest of the room died in darkness, a strong white light beat down on Herenden's chair. One by one the screens on the wall lighted and dozens of faces appeared; men, women, children — swamp-people, tongers, gate-keepers, peasants — all gaped at the man before them in semi-moronic curiosity and fear. Their voices came crackling in, jumbled and stuttering but agreed.

"That is the one!" "He I saw at Port Austral lock." "He came from the water at Omyr Dam." "Aye, an Earthian with yellow hair." "He buried something in the Great Seawall at Llypu!" Etc.

Herenden wasn't too interested in their sincerity — their identification would have been as positive, he knew, had Keating sat in his place. Or Doc. Or any Terran. But the screwy thing about it was that *he seemed to recognize many of the faces.*

Take the little girl who said he gave her a sugar-bar — why, he almost remembered putting the confection in her grubby paw!

As the voices went on, naming times and places where he'd been seen or had left some trace, Steve began to wag his head like a punch-drunk pugilist. He had alibis —was fast asleep many kilometers distant in most cases — and yet dams, canal locks, reclamation areas he knew he'd never seen were somehow clear in his mind.

"Enough!" Keating ordered. The screens went dark, the voices died, the lights sprang up. He moved, forward, jiggling. "That's it, Herenden. Are you still denying you're our man?"

"Those dreams . . ." the engineer muttered. The man called Doc straightened. "Good Lord, I must be going crazy!"

"What's that?"

Herenden got a grip on himself. "Nothing."

The old marchand tottered to his

feet. "He must say. Soon is the Orbal Congress. He *must* say!" His uniformed entourage gathered about him and, while Keating bowed as low as his girth would permit and mumbled assurances, the noble wavered out.

Steve Herenden looked after him in disgust. The palsy was not alone from age; the ruling prince of the Province of Venusburg was hopped to the eyebrows on *ryllx*, a lotus opium.

"How can self-respecting Earthman sink to doing the dirty work of creatures like that?" he wondered.

Though the cadaverous Doc remained unaffected, his fat companion was stung. "Damn you, did *I* ask to be sent here? I had me a nice accounting business started, my eye on a wench and a housing unit all picked out when a bloody press gang got me. Sent me out for five years, thanks to some agreement made before I was even born.* Five years! I should spend 'em in a stinking barracks?"

Herenden wasn't listening. A possible solution to the puzzle had come to him. "So I've got to talk before the next Orbal congress meets. Why? Didn't I hear somewhere that the Galaxy is pressuring Venus into more liberal treaties."

"Oh, a politician, are you?"

"No, but maybe I should have paid more attention. When you renegades pick up a simple engineer, fourth class, and build a frame around him, it might be handy if he knew why."

Keating glanced at the thin man. "Well, why?"

"It wouldn't be because the Orbists are going in for a little terrorism, would it? And need a confessed saboteur to quiet the rabble? Those little people who have been wondering lately how come the little people of other worlds are so much smarter than they? Those poor bubbleheads who can't think for themselves and yet resent it when an outlander 'suggests' something? Ask your subordinate, Trug, how happy he is about taking 'suggestions'!"

"That's enough, Herenden."

But the prisoner rushed on. "The commoners are getting a little too much galacticism rubbed off on them for their feudal lords, aren't they? The impressment of technicians and other skilled 'helpers' is backfiring. The Orbists' beautiful slogan 'One World; Not Thousands,' no longer charms the peasants —"

The fat man sent his fists crashing into Herenden's unprotected face — and the engineer laughed through battered lips. Keating was through; they both knew it. Steve Herenden would never talk now.

*The Technological Assistance for Venus Pact of 2084.

He had a counter reason; and since he was to die in any case, he'd die in stubborn silence.

The cadaverous man spoke for the first time. "Maybe I'd better take over the interrogation now, Chief."

Memory's ear caught some inflection, and Herenden's narrowed stare went to him. Was this another of the weird dream-acquaintances? Surely that face would be remembered in hell.

Keating turned away, breathing curses. "All right, Gristell. Anything! Take him before I kill him!"

Without rising, the corpse-like doctor nodded to one of the batoneers. The Martian reversed his weapon and a shaft of violet light stabbed into Herenden's eyes, blazed deep and hot into his shriveling consciousness ....

He came alive slowly, infinitely slowly, auditory nerves first. A voice droned on and on, endlessly, and as soon as he regained enough control he stopped it. In the middle of a word.

He opened and managed to focus his eyes. He was still strapped in the chair facing the desk, behind which now sat the gaunt Doctor Gristell. Only his original three captors were present; Keating had gone — unless he was somewhere in back of —

"Don't move your head, young man. It could be fatal."

Herenden had never scared easily, but there was something about that flat warning that iced his spine. For there was something very wrong about his head, sensed rather than felt.

"What . . . happened?"

The deep-set, mesmeric eyes probed him. "Molecular shock. Relax, the anaesthetic is wearing off satisfactorily."

So that accounted for his lethargy, his will-lessness.

"You have just been telling me most of what you remember before and during your impressment service here. The facts are interesting, but incomplete. This is the first time I have failed to get complete facts."

Herenden struggled to dominate his will, forcing a grin he never felt less like delivering. "Sad, Doctor. Doesn't it occur to you that when I spill, I tell all?"

Some sort of expression flickered deep in the probing eyes. Surprise? Relief? Certainly not amusement. Gristell shook his bony head.

"There is more, much more. Those dreams of which you spoke. Of such I can find no trace."

"Good gad, you have to know my dreams, too?"

"Most of your dreams I have learned. But not all. There are curious blank spaces in your recollections."

"How, curious?"

The doctor's breathing had grown perceptibly worse. He reached into a drawer and drew forth a highly polished silver globe, standard equipment with the sufferers of Venus lungs. An oxygen generator and inhalator. He took a few gasping sniffs and set it on the desk between them.

"You must realize that I have been living in your mind for twenty-four hours a day. Since long long before your term of service here. In fact, I went back to the years —"

He was interrupted by a hoarse cry, almost a scream. It came from Herenden. The engineer's face was ashen, his eyes protruding, and his big hands dug fresh fingernail marks in the chair arm. Doctor Gristell and the Insecpos tensed.

Reflected in the silver globe on the desk, Herenden saw himself, squat, distorted, unreal. His head, greatly enlarged, appeared to have been shaved clean on top; and from this area, like quills from a porcupine, emerged dozens of tiny, gleaming wires. Out of his scalp; out of his skull; out of his very brain itself!

The thing resembling a diving bell now loomed above him on its tripod, and up into this the wires led. On the window-like screen trembled a vague, faint repetition of the exact scene the engineer was seeing — *exactly as he was seeing it!*

"Come, come," the doctor said. "No need to go into a state of shock over a simple MVS."

"MVS?"

"Mnemono-videoscopy. Memory portraiture, if you will."

"Damn you, you ghoul! What are you trying to do, pick my brains?"

"Precisely. By a direct penetration to your memory centers, we have tapped and are transforming into images the weak electric impulses of those —"

"Take them out!" Herenden begged. *"Please!"*

Gristell frowned. "Control yourself, young man. You would not have suspected the nature of the inquisition had I not unwittingly set this inhalator on the desk. Now then, about those dreams you — don't move your head! About those dreams you mentioned, were you tired when you woke from them? Physically fatigued?"

Herenden said "Yes," shakily, not paying attention. Was it his imagination — or were those wires becoming white-hot?

"And did it seem to you that you performed, during them, acts unusual if not actually foreign to you?"

Holding his neck so stiffly that it ached, Herenden made a superhuman effort to quiet his wracked

nerves.

"No! No more answers until you get these wires out of my brain. I'm seeking double — I'm going insane!"

Gristell peered at him for several moments and then sighed. He pressed a button on his desk and stood up. "This may not be the last of these sessions," he warned . . . .

When, some time later, Keating joggled into the room and around to stare down at him, Steve Herenden was leaning weakly against the back of the chair. The fat man looked at the pad of tape on his shaved head and grinned.

"Tough boy eh? Rather get it taken out this way than talk things over with me, huh?" He looked at Gristell. "Get it all, Doc? Sound and pictures?"

The gaunt man shrugged rack-like shoulders. "Enough to prove his associations were not entirely innocent, at any rate. If you will step over here to the encephaloscope . . ."

Gradually Herenden grew curious about the persistent buzz somewhere in back of him, about the drone of a voice he hardly recognized as his own. He straightened and tried to look around the chair, but he was strapped too tightly. Then he remembered the inhalator on the desk and stared into its gleaming convex side.

The metal monster on the tripod had been moved back to the other end of the room and was being used as a re-run projector, self-screening and reproducing Herenden's words from a sound-track. Steve watched the distorted images flicking and wavering, caught some of the doped-sounding narration that accompanied them.

" . . . Pop a propellant chemist at Leytown — Never could've made Tech without that athletic scholarship — Almost entire class impressed immediately after graduation . . ."

Travelogue through the young manhood of Steve Herenden. The Insecpos must have monumental patience to want to sift all that, he thought. And just looking for evidence of — what?

There must be something they needed to round out this sabotage case against him. Or did they suspect he *knew* something? Something that could be dangerous, coming out in court?

Herenden's wandering thoughts returned to the men behind him. The projector had stopped, and they were gathered in a muttering circle below it. On the screen was the almost formless photo of a grandfatherly old guy with a waterfall mustache, bi-focals perched far down his nose. A napkin was tucked into his collar, and he was in the act of raising a cup to

his mouth.

" . . . .undoubtedly he," came wisps of Dr. Gristell's light voice. "Absensus . . . professor of psychophysics, political agitator, militant foe of Orbism . . . million consumars on his head . . ."

"By Jupiter!" came the high-voiced, clearer words of the fat man. "But where does *he* come in?"

"Casual meeting . . . Sandia spaceport restaurant . . . drugged . . . .hypnotism during which . . . post-hypnotic directions . . . .."

Herenden no longer doubted the devilish efficiency of Gristell — or of his own subconscious. Even with these hints, he had to dredge deep into his conscious memories to place the old man. They had indeed shared one of the tile-topped tables at the spaceport diner — did things always have to happen to him at spaceports? — but old Walrus Mustache had spoken no word to him, had hardly glanced at him over his glasses, until Steve lurched to his feet, suddenly sick and dizzy.

"Whoa, boy, what's ailin' you?" he had asked then. "Looks like you et somethin' didn't agree with you."

Herenden blacked-out briefly, there, and when he came around, the old man had him in the men's room, leaning over a bowl, splashing cold water in his face.

"How's that, boy? Want me to get you a doctor?"

"No. No, thanks. I'm okay now," Herenden remembered saying. And he was; the dizziness passed as quickly as it had come. The old man had patted him on the shoulder and gone his way.

"Delayed takeoff . . . . twenty-four hours," came the doctor's reedy voice. "Herenden unaware . . . .time lapse . . . ."

"Never mind that," Keating said. "What about —"

"Dreams? . . . . No success . . . memory block . . .only Abensus has key . . ."

"Try again, confound it! Burn his brains out!"

". . . . if you wish, but I have . . . . better plan . . . ." The doctor's voice weakened still more and Herenden lost the rest. He gathered there was some sort of an argument going on, but his thoughts were diverted to a new subject. Slowly his lips whitened and his wrists swelled impotently against the straps.

Abensus!

Never had the happy-go-lucky Steve Herenden felt such purposeful rage, such murderous, choking fury. Lincoln Abensus — the interplanetary spy and plotter, the octopus no one knew but everyone hated! Posing as a harmless, grandpappy guy, dawdling over a cup of protein broth in a cafeteria, weaving a hypnotic spell over a kid he'd never even seen before.

Knowingly making Steve a dupe, a cat's-paw— knowing he'd take the rap eventually.

How could such a monster exist in a civilized age? Why, years ago — in his younger days — he'd even taught for awhile at N. I. T. Neuroelectronics, or something like that . . . .

Though his mouth was clamped, Herenden's mind echoed with all the blistering profanity learned from two world's rough laborers. If, just for one instant, he could fit his aching fingers around the withered neck of that black-souled old . . . . .

Ah, what was the use? For thirty years experts had been trying to track down that old devil — detectives with every facility. And freedom. Here *he* was, a captive, a doomed man in the hands of Venus' dread Insecpos — who were even now gathering around his chair for another go at him.

Keating was chewing on full lips. "I still think he'll talk. He's been holding out on the encephaloscope just like he held out on me, damn him. Let's give him one more taste."

Gristell moved slowly back around the desk, supporting himself. "No," he panted. "Tomorrow . . . Not a . . . torture instrument . . . you know. Needs . . . fresh minds . . "

The fat man hesitated "Well, you're the doctor — Oh, all right. Trug, take this hard guy back to the cell block and — I mean, may I suggest you lock him up, gracious sir?"

He signed to the two Martians to follow him, and jiggled away. The Venusian glared after him, slowly stooping to unstrap the prisoner. "Earth scum!" he muttered. "As soon as I am chief . . ." He jerked Herenden to his feet.

Steve last saw Gristell slumped at the desk. He was sniffing at the inhalator and staring thoughtfully at his reflection.

The cells lined a dark corridor, at the far end of which a stone door stood slightly ajar. Herenden's pulse pounded, seeing it, and he waited for the Insecpo to make one mistake.

He did. Still grumbling, he bent to unlock a cell door. Steve brought a slashing palm-edge down on the thick neck just below the nerve center at the gill opening, and the clang of the closing cell-door coincided with the thud of Trug's body inside. Another instant and the Teran was running toward the door, so oddly and invitingly open to the gray Venusian dusk . . .

Forty hours later — and twelve out of Venus' eternal cloud envelope — an odorous, disreputable Herenden stood before the waspish, red-faced skipper of the space-

freighter *Orion*. A thin trickle of algae mash felt its way down his back, and his streaked face showed the harrowing details of his last day on Venus.

"A likely story," Captain Christiansen snapped. "Stowing away in my mash tanks because of some nonsense about a secret police force being after you. *I* think you're a deserter!"

"You have my discharge papers to show that I'm not," Steve said slowly. He had the distinct impression he was straight man in some comedy. The captain was brusque enough, but the others in the control room, particularly the Mate wore suppressed grins.

"Well, it's too late to turn back. I'll have to turn you over to the Sandia authorities. In the meantime . . ."

Herenden stared out through the thick glass of the navigation port. Stars were "scattered like diamond-dust on the cloth of night," and somewhere out there was Earth — and Abensus.

"You are carrying passengers, Captain?"

"Aye, a few. Fifty or sixty, mostly health cruisers. Why? You won't be one, my boy, so don't make plans. You're going down to the engine-deck and work your passage!"

"That's all right with me. It's just that I have a feeling — Well, my escape may have been planned, and among your passengers may be someone assigned to follow me."

"Follow you? Get out of here! Get to work! You got more imagintion than one of them 'infinite-space' writers!"

The *Orion* made the usual sweep to avoid the trajectory of the scheduled liners, and took her full seventy-nine days to reach Terra. Twenty-four hours out, Captain Christensen underlined Herenden's suspicions by stopping beside him on rounds.

"How they treatin' you, my boy?"

"Fair enough. I'm not being overworked, sir."

"No? Well, we don't want no stowaways claiming we made slaves out of 'em. Which reminds me, I'm usually pretty busy when we brake in and afterward. It may take me some time to get around to calling the authorities, and I don't want you slipping away out of the cargo port or somewhere. Understand?"

Since he accompanied this pronouncement with a huge and unmistakable wink. Herenden had to nod he understood. But he didn't entirely. Many spacemen were rabid Galactists, of course — or pretended to be for a cut of profitable smuggling — but it was too much to expect that Steve would pick the hold of a . . . .

Or was it? Was *any* of this escape coincidence?

Sandia, the oldest spaceport of the western world, was as busy and pockmarked as ever; and on the horizon glowed the lights of metropolitan Albuquerque, ancient but still growing. The engineer leaned in the open cargo hatch and breathed deeply of cool air, untainted by the ever-present methane of Venus' atmosphere.

Then he dodged back! Down the gantry escalator came a trickle of dark forms from the passenger decks, moving slowly past. Had the shoulders of one of them, a cloaked and black-hatted man, lifted and fallen in the exaggerated gasping of a Venus-lunger?

The man never turned or showed any interest in his surroundings. Herenden peered out to watch him hire a chair under one of the unloading lights below; saw it go putt-putting off toward the monorail terminus. "Whew!" he breathed.

Hell, there must be plenty of old Venus Hands around, he rebuked himself. If you're going to get heart failure every time you see one . . . .

Night was closing in again, and this time Steve Herenden welcomed it. For three days he had been jealous of every minute spent in bed; and for three days he had haunted restaurants — especially the spaceport diner — bars, even Galactist-front clubs in every waking moment. And to a gradually deepening twin conviction.

One was that he was being watched. Though he could spot no tail, his room had been searched and peculiar whorls on the screen of his visiphone looked like a line-tapping job.

Secondly, he became aware that encountering Abensus publicly was a faint hope. It seemed less and less likely that another casual stranger would appear to try more hypnotic tricks, though he was prepared for any clever disguise.

Then, verging on despair, Herenden had an inspiration. Oddly enough, it came by way of another gaunt and gasping lunger who chilled him with a second reminder of Gristell.

"The devil!" he muttered. "Am I going to see that fiend wherever I turn? Next I'll be dreaming of him."

Dreaming? . . .

He stared from his hotel window, across the rooftops to the distant, soaring towers of the Northern Institute of Technology, excited by a new thought.

Of course. That was the answer — it had to be! All he had to do was sleep. If Lincoln Abensus needed his cat's-paw — and from what the brain-machine had failed

to reveal, it seemed logical — he must already have planted post-hypnotic instructions that would take the engineer to him at the proper time.

That day, in an out-of-the-way antique shop, he found an old-fashioned needle gun, almost hopelessly rusted. But rust was no problem to one who had served on humid Venus, and Steve soon had the tiny pistolette as lethal as it had been in the days before all civilian arms-manufacture had been banned.*

As though in answer, he had barely fallen asleep on his fourth night when the vivid, demanding vision came. . ..

. . . . a nameless creature of dread, alone on deserted night streets wandering . . . cold, cold . . . . a shadow flittering after, now half seen, now a part of shadows . . moonlight silvering towers of long ago . . . late for class again, hurry, hurry . . . . that corridor of cells? . . . no, another; a long black tunnel dim-glowing from a rhombus of light . . . . cast from a doorway far down the length of it . . . wavering, growing . . . suddenly in it, light beating hurtfully . . . a laboratory, a man in a white coat at a table . . . . that obscene globe like a diving bell; not on a tripod now, suspended from the ceiling . . . . . and the man in white turning . . . . Oh! God! No, no! . . . Not that apocalyptic face again . . . . that grinning skull . . . .

". . . . Gristell!"

Yellowed skin stretching drum-tight over teeth and cheek-bones, the strong light blacking eye-pits, cheek-hollows. A death's-head approaching, hands smacking sharply: "Wake! Wake up!"

He was awake, but not awake. His hand stole to his belt. The tiny needle gun was still hidden there; its metal cold and sanity-restoring, it slid into his sweating palm.

"It *is* you!"

"Are you awake? Good. Now—"

"You followed me, watched me. But then . . .how did you get here? Ahead of me, ahead of . . . ." He flung himself back, pointing the weapon. "Stay away from me, Gristell! I'm after —"

"Whoa, boy, what's ailin' you?"

Herenden spun wildly. They were alone in the lab.

The gaunt doctor's rictus was meant to be a smile. "You still don't know me? Look closely. I'm the man I deliberately made you want to murder. I'm Lincoln Abensus."

Steve stared. "No! You can't be."

"Because I'm now skin and bones? Coccidioidosis."

"In three years? Fungus lungs

*By the Interplanetary Disarmament Treaty of 2107.

takes more —"

"I know. Result of a massive infection. I had to get to Venus soon after you did — and I had to appear as one who had spent a lifetime in the back-country."

The engineer shook his head as though to clear it. "But then . . . what you've done . . ."

Abensus shrugged. "We all must die sometime."

"You're lying! Do you expect me to believe you'd destroy *yourself* for some idiotic cause like Galactism?"

"A few of us don't think it's idiotic. At any rate, I have precedent — Socrates, Joan of Arc, a man named John Brown . . . But never mind that. What's this about my following you? I didn't, you know; didn't need to. I had you come here hypnotically to —"

Herenden's young features were rock-hard. "I know why you had me come here. And I know that you, as Gristell, must have set up my 'escape.' What I don't know is why you thought you could pick on *me* to drag your political chestnuts from the fire!"

The emaciated man came forward, paper-thin hands outstretched.

"My deepest regrets, young man. My using you this way was not intended to be cruel or wayward, no matter what you think now. We were up against it — still are! And when I learned of your assignment and training, I knew you were our man."

He paused, neck-cords lifting then went on. "Unfortunately, there was no time to convert you, or try to buy you —

"Stop right there!" Herenden snapped, and the pistolette threatened. "You're not mesmerizing me again, I warn you."

Abensus let his rotating hands fall, and the gleam died out of his deep-sunken eyes. "No, of course not. You were a good subject, intelligent, daring — and guileless. You followed instructions to the letter, while I stood by to protect you."

"Protect me?" Steve Herenden laughed harshly. "Apparently you you had me break every law in the book without — How long could you hope to keep the Insecpos off my neck, you maniac?"

"Until you were safely away. Let me remind you, my young friend, I had made myself indispensable. It wasn't difficult to lead men like Keating on false scents, steer them away from you — until you got into that brawl at the Spaceport Tavern."

"Oh, I'm to blame for that, am I?"

"You are. Had you remained sober, remembered your neutrality lessons, Keating would have missed you. It was pure ill-luck that

the Vegan miner had to appear and stir you up."

"I wouldn't say that, Doc! It's turned out to be quite a break, quite a break!"

Both Herenden and Abensus turned — one convulsively, the other with iron control — on hearing the mocking, high-pitched voice. Just inside the door stood the obese, purple-clad figure of Keating. Beside him, in the gaudy robes of a visitor to an inferior planet, was Captain Trug, aiming a *fix* at Herenden with a molecular baton. The look on his unbeautiful face showed he had not forgotten the indignities inflicted on him in the cell-block.

"Your little talk's been mighty interesting, Doc." Keating bounced forward, highly elated. "Or should I call you Prof? Professor Troublemaker Abensus! Right under my nose and I never guessed it — not until I found a Doctor Gristell's death certificate."

The professor's deep eyes brooded on the fat man. "So you had me followed."

"Uh-uh. You'd left too quick for that. I trailed this youngster, figuring you'd get hold of him somehow. Say, it looks like I'm a million consumars richer, as of right now."

Herenden caught the Venusian's quick scowl. "Aren't you sharing that with the captain?" he needled.

"Oh, sure," Keating chuckled uneasily. "I meant to say *we* are richer, honored collaborator."

Trug rumbled deep in his barrel chest. The reward is mine! I am the only Supreme Being present, and the Law says —"

"We'll go into it later," said Keating. "Prof, I notice you have another encephaloscope here. You planned to get your hypnotic pictures out of this ox, didn't you? Well, go ahead!"

Abensus was behind Herenden's line of sight, but his voice sounded utterly tired and hopeless. "I'm afraid that is out of the question, now. The young man would never submit."

"He'll submit — or else!"

"Like hell I will," Steve raged "I wouldn't let my best friend dig into my brain with that thing, and no one here would ever be mistaken for my best friend. If I wasn't *fixed* —"

"Shut up!" Keating slapped him and Herenden reacted. A stab of numbing pain caught his arm halfway and the pistolette left his nerveless fingers to clatter on the floor.

"Ho, armed, were you?" Keating kicked the weapon contemptuously. "Get him under that 'scope," he said to the professor. "I want those pictures!"

"Why?" Herenden sneered. "To blackmail your masters?"

"I see you still do not understand MVS," came Abensus' frail sigh. "The subject must submit willingly, or at least unknowingly. This young man has been made aware and antagonistic. He would have to be brought to the belief that he wants to help you — and that would require a great deal of convincing."

"An understatement if ever I heard one," Steve said.

"I'll give you just half an hour to convince him, Galactist. Then we all head back to Venus and some really expert convincing at I. S. P. headquarters. I'm done playing."

Abensus was silent for so long Herenden almost forgot himself and looked around. The breathless voice came at last.

"Very well," it said impassively. "I will do what I can. Mr. Herenden, to save yourself further torture, you had better understand something of the situation we are up against."

"I understand more than enough."

"The Venus question has always been touchy, largely because of its feudal system of fiefs and its virtual monopoly on algae basics and commercial radium. It exports 90 percent of the galaxy's aminos and over two thirds of its radioenergized fuels. But, since little is *im*ported, save gems and gold for the vaults of the governing drakes, marchands, serls and conyns, the trade balance is a powerful weapon in their hands. The Assistance Pact of '84, whereby the galactic worlds supplies technicians, artisans, 'advisors' in every field — "

"By impressment,"" Herenden interjected. "Slavery!"

"At no cost to Venus, anyway. So that now we not only have built and developed its economy, but are also producing and selling the fruits of it at exorbitant prices — to ourselves."

Keating yawned rudely. "Get done, will you? You can't blame the Orbists for our stupidity."

"No, indeed, my friend. But our Brotherhood does feel that their propaganda, their repeated insistence that Venusians are too superior to need education, should be counteracted . . ."

Herenden was no longer listening to the words. It occurred to him that old Abensus was not talking for his benefit or even for Keating's. The old devil was building up to something entirely different. What?

"However, that policy has backfired, as our young friend discerned. The Galactic Confederation believes it has gained enough votes to force a new and modified trade treaty through the next Orbal Congress, at Venusburg. In spite of the Orb Firsters."

Trug was not following, that

was sure. His mouth drooped laxly, and hand on the baton twitched with impatience.

"Your guess as to why a confessed saboteur is needed was close to the mark, young man. But the Orbists want to hoodwink the Galactic worlds rather than their own people. For, you see, *a peasant uprising would be no threat to them in any case.*"

Keating frowned. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that every dam, every sea-wall, every Galaxy-supervised installation, in fact, has been mined with Gormanite."

"Gormanite?" Steve said. "The subsonic disintegrant?"

"You're crazy!" Keating snapped. "You don't know —"

"Correction, we *do* know. We can't prove it— not without the mind-pictures of eighteen underwater inspections this young man carried out. But the Orbists have smuggled enough Gormanite, and are fanatical enough, so that if a new treaty is ratified, they will try to blow up, flood, destroy Venus."

"What?" Herenden said. "Commit suicide?"

"Virtually, if they succeed. And force war, if they — or the 'Galactist saboteurs' — fail. Oh, the few thousand innercircle members, the high-born, will be safe enough, with their riches. But the planet will go back to jungle, and millions of swamp-people, of shop-keepers and pretty officials, will die . . . Do you hear me, Captain Trug?" the reedy voice lashed out with sudden and surprising vigor. "Your people will die!"

"Stop that!" Keating squealed. He admonished the Venusian, "Don't listen to him, Trug! He's trying to divide us!"

Trug croaked a horrid laugh. "No," he said. "I myself am rich now. I will be one of the high-born."

So that was it? Herenden waited through a moment of silence. Behind him was the labored, disheartened breathing of a resourceful old villain who had reached the end of the trail.

"I'm still not convinced —" he started.

There was a sharp crack of glass close by, and his head snapped around automatically. Immediate and excruciating cramps seized his *longissimus capitus* muscles, and he caught no more than the barest glimpse. Abensus was coming erect, the jagged neck of a laboratory flask in one hand.

"I've wanted to do this . . . . for a long time," he panted. "Now . . you will have to kill me . . . to stop me!"

Keating backed. "Keep away, Doc! So help me I'll — Trug! Stop him! *Fix* him!"

The professor was now in Herenden's line of vision, and he

could understand the fat man's fright. Through watering eyes, the old man looked like one who had really blown his hatches. Gaunt, skeletal, savage; an insane light glowing in his eye-sockets.

Keating's voice shot higher. "Stop him, Trug! Turn that baton on him!" He tore his stare away from the claw of ragged-edged glass to see that his aide, glowering, was making no move to obey. "You fool! What are you doing?" He made a snatch at the baton. "Give me that thing, damn you! Quick!"

The Venusian jerked it aside. "You speak so to *me?* A Supreme Being?"

"You goddam toad, I'll send you to the shark—"

Captain Trug's pursy mouth writhed. His huge torso swelled to the bursting point. "Earthian!" he hissed. "Low-born foulness —" He turned the molecular cane full on his superior.

Keating's screeching was cut as by a knife. He contorted like a fat doughnut in an eggbeater. There was the sound of ripping cloth, and great gaps appeared in the purple jumper-suit, at dislocated shoulder-, hip- and knee-joints. He seemed to shake the room with his thumping fall . . .

The whole thing happened so quickly Herenden acted with reflexes that might have had an intuition and a will of their own. Scarcely had the baton been turned from him before he was flinging himself to the floor, scrabbling for the pistolette. He whipped it up and triggered it from where he lay.

Trug gave a hoarse bellow. He dropped the baton and grasped his needle-pierced forearm. For a long instant he crouched, shocked and moaning; then stumbled away into the darkness of the corridor. Herenden jumped to his feet to follow.

"Let him go. He's served his purpose."

Abensus stood up from where the fat man still lay in his dreadful rigor. "Dead," he said calmly, and touched the fallen stick with his toe. "It takes a strong heart . . . . to survive the full force of one of these . . ."

Steve Herenden nodded, sickened. "Another of your little inventions? he asked nastily.

"No . . .a Martian weapon, I believe." Abensus surveyed him briefly, sadly; then he turned and groped his way to one of the stools at the bench. "You still . . . think of me as a villain . . . and perhaps I am . . . . perhaps I am . . ."

Herenden stared down at the huddled body. What made villians? There, but for the grace of God and an athletic scholarship. . . . .

His head jerked erect and his eyes went carefully around the room. "The devil! I just noticed — this is a sub-cellar at Northern

Tech! How long has this been your hideout?"

The professor didn't reply. His head was on the table, and only the arched, bony back moved, rising and falling convulsively with the rasp of his exhausted breathing.

It must have been years. All this equipment wasn't assembled overnight. But that meant co-operation wih the authorities; approval of the regents, the faculty! Damn it, who all belonged to that society of interfering nonconformists? Maybe the very teachers who preached ethics and neutrality and Dalecarnegism.

What *was* this Brotherhood? Herenden studied the man before him, who was slowly dying from a disease deliberately contracted in the services of a universe that cursed his name and would probably curse his memory. And the first leader, Cotsworth, captured, who on the eve of his execution declared that "Man seems no longer born to valor, but must be sold on its worth."

These were the men who let themselves be thought of as gangsters, spies, murderers. Why? To avoid implicating the ambassadors, the peace-seekers? To be, in their turn, cat's paws?

Swallowing he croaked, "Professor, is it really true? Are the Orbists planning to blow up Venus?"

"Yes."

"And . . *I* can stop them? How?"

"Two ways . . . First, your memory graphs would convict them . . . in the eyes of their own people. Second, your tests would show . . . the detonating wave-length . . . . which must be jammed . . . ."

"I see." He saw, all right. So within him he had the knowledge to save a world of helpless people. Moreover, at the same time it would strike a blow at impressment, a crime against less stupid but equally helpless people of other worlds.

No! he thought. It's too much! Why should *he* be the one to have wires stuck in his brain? Why should *he* have to risk — what? Death? Insanity? — for some freedom, to quote Keating, signed away long before he was born? . ..

Man seems no longer born to valor . . ." he breathed. What was valor but a sudden, reckless disregarding of self? A final determination to do what is right, at whatever cost?

"All right, Professor, you win! Bring on your devilish memory camera!"

Abensus slowly raised his head. Steve couldn't see his face, but the voice was transfigured. "You . . . mean that?"

"Of course." Herenden spoke with irony and truth. "What's a cat's-paw for, if not to take the heat off wiser hands?"

THE END

ADVERSITY

By Virginia Cross

Take a reasonably everyday situation—a woman about to give birth to a child. Add a reasonably every-day science-fiction situation — atomic-bomb destruction. The result—a "shock" story that may give you chills!

THE last woman on earth was pregnant, and she was very near her time. At least, so far as she *knew*, she was the only woman —probably the only human.

There was no one to help her at all. There were a few insects left, small fish, gophers, snakes—things that, like herself had been accidentally protected deep in the ground when everything above exploded and burned.

And there was Kelly. The unclassifiable Kelly. Not like the fish and bugs, the *little* survivors: no, Kelly was bigger than she was, but he certainly wasn't *human*. He'd had the best protection of them all, in his deep artificial cavern here in the park.

She recalled some of what the now-melted sign on the fence had said about him: a Troglonoid, an amphibian type of life freakishly left over from the Carboniferous Era . . . At least, that's what they'd thought; no one could really have known.

He seemed to have some humanoid traits, but what he most looked like was a frog, eight feet tall. Eileen remembered there'd been a lot of publicity when the Park authorities outbid every other Zoo in the world for him; and there were all sorts of news stories and magazine articles and TV shows on how desperately they

were working to keep him alive while they constructed this elaborate cave-home for him here.

Yes—that was it—some expedition into the newly discovered Pennsylvania Honeycomb Caves—back in 1985—had found him. He was hurt by a fall, or some accident which kept him from leaping or swimming away in the underground river.

Maybe he'd even been a freak for what would have been his own era? Carboniferous . . . that must have been way, way, back, she thought, vaguely, when coal was being formed. Or was it peat? Or was peat only in Ireland? Weren't there things like dinosaurs and pterodactyls, too? She brushed her tired hand across her forehead and gave up. It wasn't the sort of information her education encompassed. What was the difference, anyway, when, for all she knew, she and Kelly were the only things over six inches high that still moved in this scorched and crumbling world?

She called him "Kelly" because he was green; she needed the identification, somehow—he seemed more valid, having a name. And even the feeblest touch of humor helped these days.

Now that she was reasonably certain he wasn't predatory, the presence of another large living animal of some obvious intelligence was a great comfort. When he appeared at the mouth of his undamaged cavern the first time, a combination of fright and despair had combined to paralyze her. Crouched rigid, she had known that if he leaped the stream and came up the bank to attack her, she would have accepted any violent fate without outcry. But Kelly had stopped at sight of her. Then, after a frozen moment like hers, he'd cautiously backed into the mouth of the cavern and disappeared into its shadows.

Confidence, urged on by the terrible sameness and silence of her shattered world, came slowly at first, then faster. The knowledge of a living presence drew her back on this sunny bank of the stream opposite his cave.

Idly, she snapped at a passing dragonfly and shifted her awkward body closer to the stream's edge, following the warmth of the crawling patch of sunlight. In the long months that had passed like this, she had come to be as silent as the earth itself. She missed the noise, but seldom bothered to sing or hum or talk to herself anymore.

The only noise she made deliberately now was the low, musical whistle she used to use to call home the children and their dog. She used it now as a signal to Kelley that she was there. She felt—(wishfully, was it?)—that her pre-

sence comforted him, somehow, as his did her, and that if he'd felt timorous as she in the beginning, he'd lost his fear and looked forward to her coming.

(For who knew how long ago *his* personal world ended, with the loss of his own kind? Centuries? Eras? Or only at his capture in '85? Had there been a lost mate, puzzled, fretful children, left behind there in the Honeycomb Caves?)

At the sound of her whistle he came to the door of the cave and crouched there, looking across the water.

She was near-sighted, and her glasses were lost in the after-bomb panic, so the details of the big, greenish-white figure squatted on the opposite bank weren't clear to her. There was a kind of gentle deliberation in his movements, though, which she felt strongly was intended for her reassurance.

She had tried talking and calling to him, but there had never been any audible response. The up-and-down nodding motion of his head—apparently a movement peculiar to him or his kind—became more pronounced when he saw her, and even more so when she tried pantomimic gestures.

She waved to him now as he responded to her whistle, and one of his long glistening green arms moved in jerky imitation. He had learned to copy this informal salutation, and she felt it indicated definitely a responsive intelligence and perception. Surely much more than a completely animal reaction, a taught thing—wasn't it? Not like a trick taught a dog . . . didn't it argue sensitivity . . . reciprocal feelings of—of loneliness, kindness, friendliness? It must. . .

Of course she recognized the part her own despair played in this half-baked analysis. Loneliness could make you read personality into the wrigglings of an angleworm. Oh, well—

There was nothing else to do now but wait for her baby. At least it would be company for her, until— what? Well: the end. Why dread that, when she'd escaped the impossibly horrible end the rest of the world had had? It was the *before the end* part that was so starkly ugly, so that all she could face of it was "Today" and "When the baby comes." She had never been alone before, either by choice or circumstance. She hadn't been processed to endure it, with her average education and assembly-line personal history.

This was an aloneness like no other: complete, never before experienced by anyone. Not the voluntary solitude of a hermit, nor that enforced on criminals and lunatics by their fellows, nor that of being not-understood. Alone. Alone.

There was no escape but death. No hope of relief except that her baby might live. She hoped for twins again—she'd really enjoyed Judy and Ronnie during the four years they'd had to explore the world that was so far ahead of them. Tears tried to return with these memories, and she wrenched her mind away before she saw Chad again, heard his voice and felt his strong arm promising protection. That was in The World That Had Been.

The sun's progress urged her gently down the slope again to the patch of grassy bank, littered with fallen leaves and twigs from trees that half-shaded the quiet shallows where the minnows played. This was a good time.

Very, very slowly, she let her arm descend smoothly over the familiar curve . . . down, until her hand (tan, now, grubby and shatter-nailed as it had never been in her well-kempt life before) hung motionless in the water. Singly, and by twos and threes, the minnows darted gingerly back, flicking and flittering in the gentle current, curious.

When several were nudging, puppylike, into the cupped palm, she snapped it closed, and with the practiced gesture of a jai alai player sent her squirming captives flashing back onto the grass behind her. A pleased smile changed her usual sullen face, a smile of triumph as she uttered the short, barking little cry which was now almost her only vocal effort.

Bouncing heavily to her knees, she crawled back and gathered them up . . . all four little wiggling bodies.

Then she ate them, still smiling.

It was nice in the park—nicer than anywhere else she'd got to in the city. The city that was left. Unable to drive, for the first few months she'd plodded all over, wherever she could walk through the ruins, in places that didn't look too suspiciously hot . . . sleeping and finding food wherever she could at dark. There was no sign of life, no noise,—nothing. Eventually she'd circled back here to the Zoo grounds and settled, to wait for her baby.

Almost a whole room was left of one concrete building—part of a caretaker's quarters—and she stocked it with food, matches, utensils, bedding — which she dragged back on a child's toy wagon from whatever underground places she could find supplies in. Somewhere she'd read only things stored below the surface would be safe in event of atomic attack, and those were all she took, even now. For months she'd drunk only bottled beverages, but the carbonated water and sweet sodas cloyed so

that she finally risked the stream. It must be safe by now, she felt all right.

It was fortunate that the weather had changed and was almost tropical—there wasn't too much left in the way of textiles. If the old San Francisco fog had continued, she'd have had an anticlimactic death of pneumonia.

But food—that was the important thing for them both (or three?) —food was plentiful if you looked long enough. Mostly she ate it straight from the cans now; too much trouble to make fires and fuss with pans and dishes. Few matches were to be found unignited, and she hoarded these against a time when it wouldn't be easy to find lighter fluid, either. She had several good lighters, and lots of fluid, but the baby's food would have to be heated several times a day, later, and it couldn't be spared for herself now.

She worried a lot because it was hard to force herself to eat what she knew was right for the child. No fresh anything available, so she had to be extra careful combining the right cans for a decent diet. And *that* required more than good memory—it took luck, too! Almost none of the cans had labels anymore. They were torn, mildewed, eaten away by what rats remained . . . it was almost a game to open "dinner". After selecting what her memory, her mind's remembering eye, told her was the size of Baked Beans (even remembering the price) she was not too dismayed to find White Asparagus Spears. (After all, *they* cost a lot more than the Beans.) She marked up another tallystroke on the wall of her "home". The board was headed simply: Right . . . . . Wrong. The Rights were well ahead (she'd been a demon housewife, and hit all the sales and specials) but where she missed was on the fancy little cans she'd so seldom bought before . . . pates, and caviar, and curried breast of pheasant. For the first time in her life she could eat all the fancy, expensive, imported delicacies the budget had never stretched to, and she never could resist loading some onto every cartful of more-or-less-predictables.

It was a reward-game: for carefully selecting the cans of what should be carrots, spinach and canned milk (ugh!) she felt the baby required, she rewarded her own appetite once each day with one of the small, mysterious containers which promised a delicacy. After that canned milk (so easy to identify) she needed it!

Minnows were better.

You can slough off a lot of ideas and habits and conventions implanted by a society that is no longer with you. Things like comb-

ing your hair, manicuring, taking daily baths (cold, at that!) eating and sleeping at special hours . . . and not eating live minnows. Unless you went to Harvard. All pregnant women have cravings for odd foods, 'they' used to say. So if she'd suddenly developed a yen for minnows and dragonflies — what of it? What the hell was the difference.

(Oh, this loneliness was bitter, and her identity was slipping so fast.)

Next morning she felt the first light pains, and nervously remembered how they'd lasted several days before the actual birth of the twins. Well—no hospital to enrage with her false alarms this time. Encircling her middle with protective arms, she gave up the idea of breakfast. She wanted to go out into the fresh air, and walk. Keep moving. It was going to be tough from now till it was over, and she couldn't afford to go to pieces when there was no-one around to pick them up after her. She'd determined long ago that she didn't have the nerve to kill herself, nor the imagination to go crazy, so there was no point in staying huddled up here, getting blue and crying again.

It was much better outside in the sun. Idling along under the trees, she thought her constant, inescapeable thoughts of the possibility of life in other places. Was she the last? There might be someone—somewhere. Here . . . Europe . . . Asia . . . Even a whole villageful . . . But where? And what use to her if far away? Mobile, useful people would have reached San Francisco by now. They had devices for testing radiation . . . some trees still grew . . . and she was alive . . . so observers could be expected to take a chance and come into the city. No. If there were others, they were as helpless as she.

Lost, lost, lost.

Stir-crazy, with the world her cage.

Kelly wasn't in sight when she sat on the bench facing his cave. She didn't have the energy to whistle to him—it was tropically hot, and she wished the minnow pool weren't so far down the bank, or the bank so steep. The water looked cool and good. The pain had receded, but she didn't feel like moving. ("I'll bet it's tomorrow—in the middle of the night", she told herself.)

The sudden shadow and touch that made her leap up with a scream were from a falling magnola leaf, but her heart kept pounding dreadfully, and the sharp pain in her twisted ankle made her cry. Her greatest fear was to have some illness or incapacitating ac-

cident she'd have to deal with alone. In a one-woman world, that was a terrible, and chilling thing. Her sobs were half pain and half fright.

Eileen Rankin was neither brave nor cowardly, stupid nor very imaginative, ignorant or well-educated . . . but her instinctive will to survive told her she must fight panic and beat down pain. These were her enemies now.

She wanted to throw herself down on the grass and surrender completely to hysteria—so she got up, clumsily, still sobbing, and started walking blindly, anywhere, forcing hard, pounding steps onto the pain in her ankle.

It was when she went full-tilt into a bench, falling, falling with the sharp edge of its back creasing her overladen abdomen . . . pains coursing through her like it was going to happen *here*. Here—and probably quite soon.

There was no possibility of getting 'home' where she had everything as ready as possible.

The spinning bench had knocked her almost into the minnow's pool. Her right arm trailed in the water, and she scopped feebly, drenching her hair and face. She lay panting, waiting for strength for the next effort. Mechanically, feeling the familiar nibbling at her palm, she snapped her hand shut, but the movement was too slow and weak. The fish escaped and she didn't care—she wasn't interested in food right now.

In a clumsy attempt to rise, she lost her footing again and fell the second time, this time well into the stream, on the moss-glazed rocks. Frantic with pain and fear and concern for the insisting child, she flopped as helplessly as the minnows in the grass, and for the first time in months she spoke aloud:

"Oh, God, no! Not here, not in the water!"

With her head on the slimy green stones, she cried convulsively, and when hands gently lifted her and placed her on the ledge of the cave, she only cried more, feeling no reason, feeling only that she was mercifully blacking out.

Some undetermined time later, consciousness flowing back in its reverse-nightmare way, she became dimly aware of the baby at her breast, and the fact that it was living. A great, soft, dark tiredness was over her, like the wings of a big protecting moth.

It was some time before she realized that the nightmare she had been in was over—and the nightmare she was looking at was real.

She couldn't scream.

It was Kelly.

Crouched only feet away on the ledge entering the cave, with the sun beating in on him with unmerciful clarity. Not moving—just

watching her. And now she was close enough to really *see* him.

His body shaded from dark bluish green to an opalescent pearly white barely tinged with green, on his broad flat front. The fingers and toes, long, strong, knobby-knuckled, were spotted with purple. His head nodding in the old familiar rhythm was oddly flat and earless, and had a wide, grinning mouth . . . the head, too, was all white and green, darker at the back. His big tilted, protruding eyes gleamed with hundreds of shiny gold dots on an obsidan iris.

Even when he reached for her, she couldn't move or make a sound.

Numb with terror, it was minutes before she understood: he had simply reached out and patted her, gently, and retreated into his silent, nodding crouch.

He didn't want to hurt her.

Light came and went. There were leaves over her at night . . . over her and the baby.

When the baby cried, Kelly reached out and took him, quieted him with strange, soft, almost inaudible croaking noises . . . then handed him back.

The rest of the time he was working on some sort of new, nest-like-looking construction in a farther, darker corner. It was very large, this nest, and he made many trips back down into the depths where she couldn't see, returning with armloads of dry, aromatic, mosslike stuff, with which he lined it. This he patted into an oval shape, working with care and concentration.

Too weak for flight, too tired for much curiousity, she lay and watched . . . free now of all fear of him. He was no longer It, the Kelly-Thing . . . He was He, Kelly . . . definite, organized, an entity. Companion

It was on the day she first sat up that he made his demonstration. As she stretched in the sunlight, feeling its warmth bring a tingle of returning strength to her skin and muscles, touching her hand to the incredible excelsior-like tangle of her matted hair, he leaped from the stream outside in one tremendous, 12-foot bound and landed beside her.

Kelly was nodding, as usual, and now she thought he was attempting to smile. (It must be a smile —?) He stretched out his water-shining, purple-dappled green hand, and made a soft, inarticulate croaking noise. Slowly, she lowered her eyes from his face to his hand with its wriggling, silver captives.

She hesitated almost a minute before she reached out and accepted the minnows from him.

THE END

JONAH and the VENUS WHALE

By Ray Palmer

Jay (for Jonah) Abercrombie was the world's worst jinx. When he signed on the Starfish, it was the end of a beautiful fishing trip, and the beginning of a whale of an adventure.

MY NAME is Jonah Abercrombie. My great-grandfather was also named Jonah, and he used to sail from Boston in his own ship, until it was lost, and he with it. There were Abercrombies in old England, also sailors. Some of them were named Jonah; and some of them were lost at sea. There is even an old tale in our family of a Jonah who used to sail from Joppa to Nineveh, about whom there was some story of an encounter with a fish—but I don't believe it, personally. Be that as it may, the name Jonah isn't exactly welcomed aboard any vessel, and that seems to go for ships that sail the void. That's why I gave my name as Jay Abercrombie when I signed on the space ship *Starfish*. Along with my name, that fish business was just too much!

A lot of peculiar businesses have come into being along with space travel, but the business of the *Starfish* is probably the strangest of the lot. You see, the *Starfish* is *really* a fish boat! Her regular run is out to Venus, where she sits down in the water, chases fish with *sonar*, and nets them electronically. The fish of Venus' seas are the tastiest in the solar system, and the most numerous. A cargo of Venus carp is worth a fortune in the Earth markets. And the *Starfish* was regularly in the business of making fortunes for its owners.

This was my first try at a fishing trip into space, and naturally I was rather interested in how it would be done. I'd lied about my experience, in order to get the job,

but what do you have to know about fishing that any kid doesn't know? I figured I'd be able to bluff my way through until I caught on how it was done, and then I'd be okay for future voyages. You see, the crew works on a percentage basis; everybody gets a cut of the profit, and sometimes it can be quite a cut. That's why experience is required; the rest of the crew doesn't want its chances reduced by the bungling of inept anglers, if that's what they can be called.

You can see already how I'm into this thing wrong a half-dozen ways from Sunday. It would be the worst thing in the world (or space, for that matter) to let my real name be known. There's nothing more superstitious than a fisherman, except a space-hopping fisherman. No man named Jonah would ever be allowed to sign aboard a space-fisherman, that was a cinch. So, as we bellied down through the atmosphere, the cloud blanket, and into the water that seems to cover most of Venus, except for some coral islands, I was a little nervous. I had to keep on being lucky, or my name might turn out to be Mud, specifically the mud on the bottom of Venus' seas!

It turned out I had a right to be nervous. As we landed in the water, we rolled, but we didn't roll back! I walloped my head against the companionway wall, trying to stand straight, and failing. Somebody started yelling up forward, and I began to scramble that way along the slanting deck.

The yelling turned out to be the captain, swearing a blue streak.

"Of all the dash-blamed water on this dash-blamed planet, we have got to land on the only dash-blamed reef that sticks up closer than two miles below the dash-blamed surface on the whole dash-blamed planet!"

Worse still, the reef stuck up through a mudbank, and we were stuck in it.

I looked out the port, and saw we were about two-hundred yards away from a small coral island that jutted up with curiously shaped and amazingly beautiful, formations. Up above, the sky was a dazzling silvery color, almost like mother-of-pearl. The water was blue; so blue it seemed incredible. With the myriad colors of the coral, it was really something to look at, out there.

While I was looking, the captain was looking at the dials. He fussed with them quite awhile, and finally he began to loose a mass of profanity that positively had substance. It clouded up the whole control room, congealed, and sank to the floor like jelled brimstone.

"We're in a magnetic lock, a dash-blamed, diggity-dang, loppity-

poppity magnetic lock!" he bellowed.

"A magnetic lock?" I asked. "What's that?"

He whirled on me. "Any space sailor who doesn't know that a ship sails on magnetic currents in a magnetic field, ought to know what a magnetic lock is! This reef we're hung on, is iron! A gigantic dash-blamed lodestone! And it's got a field like a dash-blamed black-dwarf star! Our motors won't work while we're locked to it!"

"You mean we're stuck to it, like a magnet?"

"No, stupid! The dash-blamed field isn't holding us in that manner— we're insulated. But the motors won't rotate in a neutralized field! We've got to get at least a mile away from this reef before we can lift. Otherwise it would be a dash-blamed cinch to lift off and set down somewhere else!"

"Maybe we can tow her off," I suggested, as soon as I could get a word in edgewise between the dash-blames.

The captain exploded. "Who the dash-blame are you?"

"Jo—I mean Jay—Abercrombie," I said hastily. "One of the crew. And I think we could tow her off, sir . . ."

"Tow her! What the dash-blamed with! A rowboat!"

I hadn't met the captain before I came aboard, and afterward, I was always in the rear when he was in the fore—but I'd heard he was a real sub-soiler. He proved it now; but I stuck to my guns. I wanted desperately to get in good some way, so that when my lack of experience became apparent, as it very possibly might, it wouldn't count too heavily against me.

"Yes, sir. I think we can rig the winch to that coral island and tow ourselves off the reef. We're leaning that way, and it ought to be a cinch."

"So your dash-blamed winch is going to make it a dash-blamed cinch, is it?" he roared. "Listen, you dash-blamed fish-lugger; I been winching this ship clean around the dash-blamed solar system since you were in your dash-blamed three-corner pants, dash-blame it, and I don't need any dash-blamed worm fisherman to make with any dash-blamed bright ideas!"

"No, sir," I said.

He looked at me, scowling. "However, you're the first dash-blamed fisherman who's ever sized up a situation like a mechanic before. You sure you're a fisherman?"

"Captain . . ." I took a long chance" . . ."when we used to catch battle-bass on Saturn, we used to winch 'em into the hold, and sometimes they were so big it was a question of who was being winched,

we or the battle-bass . . . but I know from experience that a winch can move a ship like this off almost any anchorage." I'd decided that the more I stressed experience, the better it would be.

"Battle-bass," said the captain with a frown. "What the dash-blamed diggity-dag is a battle-bass? I've been fishing the system for a good many . . ."

Fortunately for me, the ship took a heavy roll at this precise instant, and the ship's mate arrived in the control-cabin entrance just in time to roll with it—smack into the captain. They both tumbled the length of the cabin with a crash you could have heard in the engine room. You should have heard the dash-blamed language that came from the dash-blamed captain as he struggled to get to his feet. I could hardly breathe in the blue air as I helped him to get his sea-legs again.

"Dash-blame it!" he roared "Leggo me! I can stan' on my own dash-blamed feet!"

I let go, and down he went, like a sack of potatoes, as the ship rolled even further. I pretended to roll with it, and rolled right out the cabin entrance and down the companionway out sight. I'd got in my suggestion, and I figured any further attention might not be too good for me, the way things were beginning to shape up. The way it looked now, even the winch wasn't going to get us out of this soup . . .

It didn't. One of the motors burnt out a bearing, first; then the winch broke. We lost a thousand feet of cable.

That's the way it went. You wouldn't believe it if I recounted the events of the next two weeks—yeah, it was two weeks before we got off the reef. Two weeks before high tide (Venus has a tide, all right, but it's not like Earth's tide, since she doesn't have a moon, and rotates very slowly on her axis.) First, we had to eat our chow cold; the cook's stoves were all anchored to the plates, and he couldn't keep a kettle on 'em—they slid off no matter what he did to hold 'em, and even if they'd held, they'd have spilled. One of the engine-men broke an arm, falling down a companionway. The garbage disposal port jammed, the outer-lock, that is, and the next time the cook opened the inner lock, the whole galley was flooded with more than twenty tons of stinking mud before it could be closed again—to say nothing of a giant squid that somehow managed to come in with the mud and broke a couple of ribs for one of the crew before it was hacked off him by the cook. It took us three days to clean the ship up, and we almost suffocated with the stench.

Every day it was something. The captain dash-blamed until he was

exhausted, and the crew, counting up the losses, were getting more and more sullen. Even if we got a good catch, this trip wasn't going to be very profitable.

"We're sure having a lot of bad luck," I remarked to the head net man, a grizzled old fisherman, veteran of a hundred trips.

"Bad luck, is it? It's wors'en that!"

"Worse?"

"Yes! I've racked my brains, but I can't think of a single jinx aboard. Not a black cat, a left-handed horseshoe, nor a Saturnian witchman's curse. If I was a religious man, I'd say we were Jonah'd!"

I gulped and turned the conversation into safer channels.

The fifteenth day after we dropped onto the reef, we floated clear. The ship had been slowly righting itself, and when we finally drifted away from the reef, there was a cheer from the crew that rang from end to end of the ship. As for myself, I felt vastly relieved. Just about everything had happened, I felt, that could happen. From now on, the trip ought to be routine. All we had to do was catch our cargo of fish and take off.

"How long'll it take us to fill the hold?" I asked the old fisherman.

He grinned at me. "A mite longer than those battle-bass of yours," he said. "It'll take more'n one fish to do it . . . but there ain't no question about it; any fool can catch fish on Venus! An' we don't have to hold our hands further apart than necessary. . . ."

I flushed, and he laughed aloud. "Don't let it get you down, son," he said. "I ain't never seen the fisherman who ain't got his fish story."

"How'd you know about my battle-bass?" I asked.

"Huh! It's been all over the ship. The first mate's been telling it ever since he heerd you giving the cap'n your line. Ain't nobody ever tried to bait the cap'n before You gotta have real fisherman's luck to hook the old boy!"

I hastened to change the subject again. "Then we'll have our catch before too long?"

"It'll be easy. Nothing can stop us now!"

But something did.

The sonar crew didn't take long locating a school of Venus carp. Not that it was hard to locate—they claimed it was the biggest school they'd ever echoed. "There's money down there!" chortled the head sonar man. "We'll fill her solid!"

Nobody knew exactly how it happened. Somewhere a fuse didn't blow when it should, and the whole sonar setup blew high, wide and handsome with fireworks you could have seen on Mars.

Naturally we had a spare sonar aboard, but it took two days to install it. When it was in, the fish were gone. We began the search all over again. This time the schools were all small, and it hardly paid to juice up the electronic net. Contrary to what you might be thinking, magnetic devices don't come for nothing—there is a fuel problem even in activating electronic gadgets. Out in space we can tap the sun's magnetic field, and when near a planet, the planet's field—but on the planet itself, we spend as much energy insulating as generating. And that takes fuel. We were using too much fuel. When it reached a certain level, we'd have to go back to Earth, and if the cargo holds weren't full, we'd make precious little profit.

You see, we can't fill the holds a bit at a time—the fish would spoil on a planet as hot as Venus. You have to fill the hold in one big netful, then take her out into space and freeze the whole thing solid, instantly. The fish are still alive when frozen, and you can see the advantage of that. But now we couldn't find a big school.

When we did, it was big enough, all right, but almost too late. We rigged the nets, which aren't really nets at all, but electronic exciters and attractors that literally pull the fish toward one magnetic pole and away from another. Since the positive pole is located in the cargo tanks, the fish swim in until the tanks are jam-packed, and then they are closed. Every kind of fish responds to a different frequency, and it is therefore possible to select your fish. The ones you don't want can be repelled. Like torpedo fish, for instance.

A torpedo fish is a sort of bloat fish. It can expand its volume enormously, when alarmed, and in the early days of fishing, quite a few ships were burst wide open when a cargo of torpedo fish got wise to what was happening to them before they got safely into space and got the quick-freeze treatment.

They say it is the little things that trip a guy up. It was a little thing tripped me up. Just as we got the sights on a big school of Venus carp, and rigged the net to bag them, the cargo ports jammed. There were the fish, swarming solidly around the ports, trying to push their way into the hold, and no way to get in.

You should have heard the dashblames then!

"Only way to open the ports is to send down a diver," said the old fisherman.

"In all those fish?" howled the captain.

"We'll have to let 'em go," said the net man. "A fast man can release the catches, and get back aboard before the fish get too far

away to draw 'em back. We'll need a skin diver . . ."

The captain looked around the crew. "Any of you men good skin divers?"

That's where I made my mistake. "I am," I said, before I had thought it over.

"Good!" said the captain. "About time you began to earn your salt. Peel down, and over you go. The lugs can be operated manually, and if you can stay down a minute and a half, you ought to be able to do it—and the fish won't have time to get far enough away in that time."

I turned pale, and hesitated.

"What's the dash-blamed matter?" roared the captain. "You chicken?"

The crew was staring at me, and I turned fiery red. There was nothing for it—I'd have to peel. And when I peeled, the truth would be out—because during my youth, while still lacking good judgment, I'd had my full name tattooed across my chest, neatly embossed on a large whale disporting in the waves.

I had to do it. I was the difference between a full hold and an empty one. And if I failed, there'd be no doubt of who was to blame.

I took off my shirt last, and to a man, the crew saw the fatal tattoo the instant it was off. There was a silence you could have heard a hundred miles. Then the head net man loosed a gasp.

"I knowed it!" he almost choked. "*I knowed it!* This ship was Jonah'd from the start!"

The captain was purple. "So you're dash-blamed name is Jonah! That Jay you use for a front handle is a fake!"

"It's not a fake, it's a . . . sort of initial," I said faintly.

The captain was white now. He turned to the waves lapping the side of the ship and pointed. "Down you go," he said quietly. "And if you don't loosen those lugs, don't come up!" And suddenly he was screaming at the top of his voice, and only dash-blames were coming out.

I rushed to the rail and dove. I failed to loosen the lugs—they were rusted shut where they'd been exposed to the Venus air while we were tilted on the reef. I came up.

And as I gasped for breath in the water, I looked up at the row of faces peering down at me and knew beyond all doubt that it would do me no good to try to climb aboard. I'd only be thrown back to the fishes, as that other Jonah had been. But like an optimist, I tried. And they confirmed my initial opinion—they tossed me back in.

I dove once more, before they could get the ship started, and managed to reach the garbage port, which was now above water, and

the lugs on this weren't rusted. I was riding inside when the ship got under way. I didn't have much hope, but it was near dinner time, and I figured the garbage port would open before the ship took off for space. If it didn't . . . .

It was the longest wait of my life!

When the port opened, I dodged a pailful of garbage, then reached out and grabbed the cook by the neck. "Don't yell," I warned. "I have been spit back by the whale."

"Jonah!" croaked the cook. "This is the end!"

"No it isn't. All this bunk about me being bad luck is bunk. I only want to get back to Earth, and I need your help."

"We'll be lucky if any of us get back!" the cook moaned.

"Get me something to wear," I commanded.

"Nothing in here but a plastoid space suit," said the cook, his color beginning to come back. "If the boys find out you're aboard again, they'll slice you up for bait! I can't take a chance on sneaking any other clothes to you."

"I'll wear the suit," I said.

He showed me where it was. I climbed into it.

"Now what?" he asked.

"You're gonna hide me till we get back to Earth, and feed me. When we get back, I'll give you every cent of my advance pay credits."

The cook eyed me with interest. "It's a deal. I'll make up for some of the profit we won't share, this trip."

"I thought you'd see it that way," I said.

Just then it happened.

Smoke began pouring from the galley, and the cook uttered a yell of consternation." The dinner's burning!"

It certainly was. In a moment, the smoke was billowing around us so thick we couldn't breathe. I couldn't see the cook, but I heard him slamming things around, heard the sound of water splashing. The smoke got thicker. I had to do it. I opened the galley door and stumbled out into the corridor.

And right into the arms of the oncoming crew, rushing to find the source of the smoke.

"The galley's on fire!" I coughed.

The head net man took one look through the helmet of my suit and groaned. "No wonder!" he said. "It's Jonah, back on board again!"

"Overboard with him before we're all dead!" shouted one of the crew. In an instant the crew was as one man in this suggestion, and before I could protest, I was tossed back into Venus' sea for the second time, and this time with no hope of getting back a-

board the *Starfish.*

I floated easily in the space suit, and watched the *Starfish* draw away from me, her open port filled with smoke and fist-shaking figures. I felt very sad. Later when the whale came up under me, I felt even sadder.

I was high and dry on its back before I realized it wasn't a whale, but a submarine of some kind. I was sprawled beside a sort of blister on its deck and atop it was what seemed to be a periscope, peering intently at the disappearing *Starfish,* which was now too far away to distinguish any details. I doubted very much if the vessel I now rode was visible to my former shipmates.

The blister beside me began to lift, opening up like the half of a clam shell. Inside it, as I struggled to my feet to meet my fate, whatever it might be, was a tiny control cabin, occupied largely by a plush-lined couch on which reclined, idly fingering the controls beside her, one of the most beautiful women it has ever been my fortune to behold. And except for a frothy looking excuse for a garment which obviously was intended to represent froth, she was wholly exposed to the naked eye.

Jonah's whale was never like this!

While I stood there, gaping, she sat demurely, patting her gorgeous sea-green hair into place, and looking with downcast eyes. Then all at once they flashed up, and she smiled sweetly at me. "Don't just stand there. Come aboard so we can be on our way."

"Well swallow me up!" I gasped. "She speaks English!"

"Naturally," she said. "We've monitored your television for many years. We'd have contacted you before, but we weren't ready."

I clambered into the submersible's control room, and almost choked on my adam's apple when the couch, the floor, and the girl, and myself also, of course, began to recede into the bowels of the ship while the blister closed tight overhead. In less than ten seconds I found myself in a large room, and reclining on couches all around the walls were dozens of women as beautiful, and as fully clothed, as my fair rescuer. I was on a submarine at least as large as the *Starfish!*

I looked around, almost dumb with amazement. Then I turned back to the girl I'd seen first. "You were saying something about not being ready," I said. "If I may continue that train of thought, ready for what?"

She smiled again. "Ready to migrate to your world."

"You don't like it here?" I asked.

"Too wet," she said.

I looked at her a moment, then shrugged my shoulders. "I am forced to agree," I said. "But if you girls migrate to Earth, you are going to cause a riot."

"Oh no!" she said positively. "That is one of the reasons we are going to Earth. We used to have violence here on Venus too, but we eliminated that, just as we will do it on Earth."

"Eliminate violence?" I asked hesitantly.

"All violence," she affirmed. "No more wars, no more fighting, no more killing, not even football games."

"It won't work," I said flatly.

"It worked here," she said just as flatly.

"How did you do that?" I asked. "Your men must be more peacefully inclined than ours."

"No," she said. "They weren't."

"They . . . weren't?"

"No . . . . they weren't."

I swallowed hard. "That's what I thought you said. But when did this all take place?"

"Oh, many hundreds of years ago."

I thought about it a moment. "What is your life span?" I asked. I meant it to be a leading question. It led nowhere.

"About the same as yours," she said.

I thought about it some more. "Then . . ."

"Artifcial insemination. Some of our men are . . shall we say . . . still partly alive, something like a certain experiment we heard described over your television, regarding an immortal bit of chicken heart . ."

"Where are we going now," I said, to change the subject.

"We're following your fishing vessel," she said. "We will overtake it soon, and then we will board it. When we have transferred the men in it to our ship, they will be taken to a safe place."

"And you?"

"We will proceed to Earth in your ship. When we get there we will proceed to make your planet a peaceful place, much better fitted for us to live on than this landless place. Sometimes we get tired of swimming . . ."

"I see. And how do you propose to make Earth peaceful?"

"We've had experience," she said.

I looked at her. And as I looked, I realized what she said was true.

She was a deadly man-trap. To look at her, you wouldn't realize she was loaded. You wouldn't even know she was a gun at your head— you'd think she was soft lips against your cheek, loving fingers in your hair. Earth had never faced a fifth column like this! I broke into a sweat.

"You seem to be hot in that

suit," she said. "Please take it off."

"Not me!" I exclaimed. "I'm perfectly comfortable, thank you."

She shrugged. "Do as you like. Besides in a few moments we will reach the *Starfish* and surface beside it."

"What then?" I asked.

"A half-dozen of us will go topside and invite the Earthmen aboard."

"They'll be suckers for such an invitation," I groaned.

"That's what we think," she smiled.

I looked around at the lovely girls reclining so innocently about the submarine. I groaned again. "This is a pretty kettle of fish!"

They all smiled and looked pleased as punch.

The captain, for such I assumed she was, picked up a tiny thing that looked like a flashlight. She pointed it at me, and that's the last thing I saw. I passed out like a light.

When I came to, I was out of my space suit, and comfortably tucked in the captain's bunk—aboard the *Starfish!* For a long moment I lay, completely confused, trying to figure it out. Then I remembered, and jumped out of the bunk with a wild leap. I discovered now that I was as naked as the day I was born, and I thought of the crew of the submersible. Obviously I was aboard the *Starfish* because I had been taken there by the peacefully-intent Venusians; and just as obviously, they must also be aboard. But why hadn't they taken me to the safe place they had mentioned as the fate of the crew of the *Starfish*. I searched the captain's wardrobe and found one of his uniforms. I put it on hastily, then stepped from the cabin. I made my way up the corridor to the control room, and then stopped short. Seated in the control chair was the girl who had captained the Venusian submersible.

She heard me enter, and turned to me with a smile. "Ah, I see you have awakened?"

"Yes," I said. "And I see we are also in space. I presume you women have begun your invasion of Earth. Well, you won't get away with it. You'll never get to Earth in this ship."

"And why not?" she asked.

"Because my name's Jonah," I retorted. "Most likely we'll blow up before we get half-way. I'm bad luck to a ship."

"I'm not superstitious," she said. "I've heard that Jonah story many times over TV. Besides, you are all wrong about an invasion."

"What do you mean? You told me yourself . . ."

"Oh, can't you take a joke?"

"A joke?"

"Certainly. We wanted to prove

to you that we are just like Earth's people, and we wrote a script exactly like some of the scripts your comedians present over television."

"Where are the others?" I asked, getting more and more befuddled.

"We're alone," she said.

"Alone!"

"You. When the rest of your crew found out you were going along on the *Starfish*, they refused to ride in the same ship. Said they'd wait until the next ship— if they *wanted* to go back."

"Wait for the next ship . . .?"

"Yes. The girls invited them to stay with them, and they seemed to like the idea. Besides, the rest of the girls got cold feet about making the trip to Earth. As long as the men decided to stay, they had what they wanted."

"Had what they wanted?"

"Of course. Didn't I tell you we were getting tired of swimming . . ."

"You mean . . ."

"I mean we're getting rather lonesome in a world without men. Our foremothers were wrong in eliminating men, and we realize it all to well. It's better to have a little violence than to be . . ."

I looked at her suspiciously. "Why did *you* decide to come to Earth?"

"Because I was lonely, and there wasn't a man for me."

I felt my neck getting red. "What about me?" I demanded. "And what did you bring me aboard for, anyhow?"

"The rest of the crew insisted upon it. They said you'd Jonah the whole planet, and so I brought you along."

"Darned generous of you," I growled.

She smiled sweetly, then reached toward the instrument panel and flicked a switch. The television panel flickered to life, and I stared at the scene it revealed. Reclining beside a pool filled with beautiful Venusian girls, lay the captain of the *Starfish*. His booming voice rang through the control room.

"This is the prettiest dash-blamed herring I've ever gotten a dash-blamed sonar lock on," he said. "Come here, dash-blame it, and give me another kiss!" He reached into the pool and drew one of the girls from the water.

"Oh, isn't he just too violent for words?' the new pilot of the *Starfish* breathed.

At that precise instant we must have entered a magnetic whirlpool in space, because the Starfish lurched, and I was caught off balance. As if I was catapulted, I was hurled across the control cabin. In a desperate attempt to regain my balance, I put my foot smack through the television screen, shat-

tering it, and grasping wildly, clutched the Venusian girl by the arm for support. But I didn't make it—I crashed to the floor, and dragged her with me. We landed in a heap, and I found her lovely face close to mine, her eyes wide and shining, and her lips slightly parted. For an instant there was silence, then she said rapturously. "Oh beat me, Daddy!"

What else could I do? Let these gals get to Earth, and they'll take it over if you don't keep them in their place! Also I don't want to be known to all Earth as a jinx, just because my name is Jonah. Besides, she was asking for it . . .

THE END

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THE CLUB HOUSE

By Rog Phillips

THE 13th World-Science-Fiction Convention, with mailing address at P. O. Box 508 Edgewater Branch, Cleveland Ohio, is already making good progress as I write this on Dec. 27, with Noreen Falasca as chairman, Nick Falasca as co-chairman, Honey Wood secretary, and Ben Jason treasurer. Their special issue progress report is out, having been sent to about two thousand people. You can get this report and an application blank by writing for them. Membership in the World Con committee, costing two dollars, entitles you to all future reports and also admission to the convention itself, which will be held Labor Day week-end, Sept. 2nd through the 5th at the Manger Hotel in Cleveland. Good work, Noreen and staff. Early organization is necessary to a really successful con because the thousand little things that should go into planning a convention can't even be thought of, let alone taken care of, by waiting until sometime in July to "get around to" going to work.

Something new in ideas is their Mystery Guest Contest. "The person chosen will not know he is the mystery guest until his name is announced at the banquet," and maybe you will win a prize if you can guess who he is. Details of the contest will be in the next progress report — out about the time you read this . . .

Joe Gibson and New York responded to my rather brutal prodding in the last issue of Universe by sending me the following letter: Dear Rog:

Judging from the local reactions to your Club House column, I'd suggest you stay out of New York for a while. Your version of New York fandom sounded just a bit queer to New York fans.

We have only two fanclubs, Rog — the New York S-F Circle and the Eastern S-F Association —plus an unknown number of small, casual groups. But grouped or singly, most local fans belong to these two organizations, including young fans once claimed by Will Sykora's de-

funct spaghetti-and-meatballs club. In fact, we haven't seen much of ol' Bloody Feuds since we stymied his fake New York bid at Chicago — though he appears, occasionally. But things have been peaceful around here for years.

Circle and ESFA members both helped Philadelphia with the '53 World Con. Afterwards, both clubs formed the Council of New York S-F Fanclubs (which other local fanclubs with provable s-f fan memberships could join, if there were others) and made plans for last October's Metrocon. We old-time fans ducked out, letting less-experienced fans have their turn at it. Committees were madly organized and things got cracking.

And months passed. Nothing happened. Finally, with two months to go, Dave Kyle and Sam Moskowitz checked up. They found the gang bogged down with problems, of course—*but the work was being done!* A slight push here, a change there, and New York had a more successful Metrocon than anyone had thought possible! (And a good bit of the work was done by a seemingly "wild" group, the Fanarchists, who hold weekly beer-sessions down in Greenwich Village; here there be fans!)

Before this, we hadn't wanted a World Con because we didn't know who'd do the work— or what else might happen with two fanclubs and various internal groups. Now we know.

The only sour note in the Metrocon's work was contributed by Calvin Beck. This kid pestered Dave Kyle for months with great schemes for a super-fanclub and super-conventions until Dave asked why he wasn't working on the Metrocon. That was all Calvin needed. Next thing we knew, *Universe* had an ad claiming Calvin's "American Science Fantasy" fanclub sponsored the Metrocon — though he'd previously admitted this "fanclub" existed only on paper. It wasn't a group; it was just Calvin Beck. And he claimed Kyle "gave" him the Metrocon when Kyle never had it to give. So the bloody New York feuds of yesteryear have come down to one kid putting on a big front.

Now you've been told, Rog. Or were you just conniving for something to "liven up" your Club House?

If you want to know, seriously, who'd be handling the New York World Con in '56, my list reads: Dick Ellington, Art Saha, myself, Dan Curran, Dave Mason, Lin Carter, Jean Carrol, George Raybin, Allan Howard, Sam Moskowitz, and Dave Kyle — plus a half-score others and an able assist from Philadelphia.

Joe Gibson
24 Kensington Ave.
Jersey City 4, N. J.

Read and approved by: (and here the signatures were written) Dick Ellington, Art Saha, Dan Curran, David Kyle, D. Mason, Sam Moskowitz, George Nims Raybin President Science Fiction Council of New York Fandom, and Lin Carter.

Hmmm . . . You know, Joe, I don't know why my version of New York fandom should sound so queer to N. Y. fans. Your letter which I have just printed above is probably the first even half way accurate and intelligible bit of information ever to come from the heart of Deepest New York. Four hundred and eighty-two words of partial enlightenment. Stack that up against hundreds of letters and dozens of fanzines in the past, put out by fans in Greater New York who were anxious to tell the world what a bunch of crooks, communists, crackpots, and dirty pros the majority groups were. Stack those up against the studied silence, no fanzines, no letters, no announcements, emanating almost daily from Manhattan. Stack it all up along with the consistent divided front New York has presented at the conventions, and you couldn't expect anything that didn't sound queer. So why the "everybody's queer" attitude of New York?

And why the snarls? (Bea! They're threatening me! Protect me!) It so happens there are a lot of fans who would like a World Con in New York because they would like to see that greatest city in the world — but they want to be sure there would actually be a con instead of a bunch of bloody corpses of ex-fans, all of whom had been determined to be Chairman. Incidentally, you neglected to say who would get that post of honor. Another thing you didn't mention was whether it would be a strictly New York show, with all traditions of World Cons ignored as they were at the Philcon, and someone introducing notables of prodom and fandom who never heard of anyone living in that Indian country called "the sticks" situated somewhere to the west of Philadelphia. Nor did you mention which clubs the signers of your letter belong to. I know that Dave Mason heads the Fanarchists, but I know that only because my vast espionage network extends right into Greenwich Village. I know that Lin Carter's signature on your letter makes it good as gold, because Lin is known and admired all over fandom. We all know you, Joe, and have read and liked your stories. We all know Sam Moskowitz heads ESFA. Dave Kyle is well known — but what club is he in now that Hydra isn't mentioned any more? And who are the others? Something else — would Circle and ESFA and the Fanarchists be willing to make public where and when they hold meetings or parties

so that fans living in N. Y. who read this column could attend?

Now, it seems to me I am forced, in all fairness, to give equal space (482 words) to Will Sykora, and to Calvin Beck, to answer your remarks about them — if they request it. However, if either of them do, I think that they should answer this question: if you refuse to work democratically with the rest of New York fandom, if you won't gracefully accept the will of the majority in the choice of committee officials, if you won't attend the meetings of the N. Y. clubs and the committees in charge of N. Y. activities, if you won't cooperate enthusiastically and unselfishly with your fellow fans in N. Y., will you at least remain on the sidelines and let New York put in its bid for the 1956 convention peacefully; or will you set yourself up as a phoney spokesman for New York and otherwise act in such a way as to make it impossible for New York to have a chance at getting the vote at Cleveland in September? I think this is a fair question. One thing I can't understand is how Calvin Beck could have been in such complete ignorance of the fact that an organized committee was holding meetings and working on the Metrocon all along while he, by himself evidently, planned a Metrocon without asking other fans to work with him.

It's rumored that Washington, D. C., and Atlanta, Ga., are also planning on bidding for the 1956 World Con. The pages of the CLUB HOUSE are open to them so they can acquaint the readers with their plans, their personalities, so that when Labor Day comes we will know enough about who wants the convention to make an intelligent decision when we vote, rather than being fooled by whirlwind, slight-of-hand, whispering-campaign tactics.

While on the subject of New York, the Fantasy Veterans Association is holding its fifth anniversary convention Sunday, April 17th, one o'clock, at Werdermann's Hall, Third Ave. and East 16th St., N. Y. C. This is open to everyone, and it's a good chance for you New Yorkers who would like to get acquainted with fans. They usually have an auction, too, so you can pick up some originals of illos in current stf magazines, books and what-have-you. Also from New York is

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; twice a month; Fandom House, P. O. Box 2331, Paterson 25, N. J. This is really a newspaper devoted only to stf doings. Isaac Asimov to be guest of honor at Cleveland. Galaxy drops 16 pages, Amazing Stories to have fanzine review department by Roger De Soto (not a pen name of mine). Send your fanzines to him

at 361 E. 50th St., Apt. 6-G, N. Y 22, for a real honest review. Those are a few of the headlines and quotes from a recent issue. You get all the news before it has a chance to spread by any other medium. In fact, most of the news that spreads comes first from F-T. (And good luck, Roger, on your fan column. Fandom could use several review columns to reach all the readers of fantasy and science-fiction.)

Now to review the rest of the fanzines. Twenty-eight of them this time. Some have more than one issue in the stack. About forty fanzines altogether. A fanzine is published every thirty-six hours. Think of that!

Some of them are just for fun and entertainment. Some, like Fantasy-Times, are serious hobbies that take leg work and system to get out. Sometimes a single issue will be a year or more in preparing. Such a one is

DESTINY FANTASY INDEX: 35c;, Earl Kemp, 3508 N. Sheffield Ave., Chicago 13, Ill. This is the index for all stf magazines and books published in 1953. It gives author, title, where it appears, of every stf story that appeared in 1953, so it is an index for the whole lot, No serious fan should be without it. Earl and Malcolm Willits, his co-editor, worked over a year on it. It's photo-offset. A beautiful item.

MINI: 10c; Jacob Edwards, 1010 Tuckahoe St., Falls Church, Va. I might have passed over this zine except that Ted White and Bob Stewart and Larry Stark seem to be picking on the poor guy. In a letter to me, sent behind Jake's back, no doubt, Ted White says, "If you review Jacob Edwards' fanmag, I'd appreciate it if you stressed the poorly done columns, . . . in short, will you please pan the entire zine?" Pretty low, I calls it. He lives in the same block as Jacob Edwards, too, at 1014 Tuckahoe St., and publishes ZIP. Well! Guess I'll skip reviewing ZIP this time. Too bad, too. It was a real nice issue of ZIP, 10c with thirty mimeographed pages, including a couple of nice stories. Come to think of it, Falls Church is in the greater Washington D. C. area, and if this feud with poor Jake is typical of fan politics at the Capitol, they should have nerve enough to bid for the 1956 World Con! Ha! Why don't you send Jake a dime for his MINI? If it does nothing else, it will make Ted White's expression quite purple.

AARDVARK: first issue, Jan. 1955; 10c; Bob Hoskins, Lyons Falls, N. Y.. Lyons Falls is up by the Great Lakes, so it's far enough from New York City to be unaffected by such things as— ah — hydrogen bombs and stuff.

A nice, dittoed zine. A long article by Mike Phillips compares the two science fiction boom periods, 1939-43, and 1948-53. It presents some interesting viewpoints. "Martian Inheritance" is a humorous twist to the idea of ancient Martian civilization, and is by Bob Hoskins himself. A letter column, too. You've made a good start on fan publishing, Bob.

OOPSLA!: 15c or 2/25c; Gregg Calkins, 2817 Eleventh St., Santa Monica, California; bi-monthly. Fifteenth issue, and still one of the most interesting fanzines. Walt Willis continues the tale of his adventures in the United States. He's the fan from Ireland who was brought over here by donations from American fans to attend the World Convention at Chicago in 1952. Bob Tucker adds flavor to this issue with the inside story of his honeymoon, in "Hot Romance and Cold Turkey." Incidentally, I met his wife, Fern, last fall at a party for them given by Ted Dikty and Judy May Dikty, and was surprised that Tucker could get anyone so beautiful. Probably she regrets it by now. Anyway, they went to Arizona. On the way back, in Missouri, their Studebaker blew a tire at sixty miles an hour and they landed in the ditch. (Ha! I once blew a tire at eighty with my De Soto and didn't even notice it until the next town.) They limped home to Bloomington a day or so after Thanksgiving Day, to eat cold turkey mooched from kinfolk. "Therbligs' is the letter column.

HARK #1:10c; Randy Brown, 6619 Anita St., Dallas 14, Texas. He got enough subscribers for his first zine, "Ipy", from my review of it that he decided to bring out a bigger and better fanzine. He also wrote and thanked me for my review. Randy brings out a nice fannish fanzine. Enjoyable. Strictly for the younger set, however, and there haven't been enough in that category lately. The cover, by Ross Storey, is really a beaut. "The Old Deal" is a fan fiction story by Roger Selaany. A take-off on Dragnet, but very well done. Keep encouraging Randy with subscriptions and he'll be a top fan editor in no time.

INSIDE/SCIENCE FICTION ADVERTISER; 25c; Ron Smith, editor, 111 S. Howard, Tampa 6, Fla.. Photo-offset. This magazine has been around a long time, and Ron is its third editor, but there's no letdown from the high standards of the past. For example. "What is Science Fiction," by Chad Oliver, alone is worth the quarter. The review of the movie, "The Egyptian" is accompanied by still shots from the movie. Doyle Lewis compares that movie with "The Science Fiction Movie." I disagree with many of his points. For example,

he thinks "War of Worlds" was a poor movie. I don't. It captured a horror of mechanization that is very authentic. I do agree with him though that there should be more quality stf movies. The only thing is, those kind aren't called stf. What about "The Man in the White Shirt?" That was very good, and pure stf, but not advertised as science fiction. "Evolution" is the grouped title of three contrasting stories of man, in the past, present, and future, by Bob Gilbert, Dave Bunch, and Howard Donnell, respectively. Donnell's, especially, was vividly written.

The new policy of the magazine will be to have much more in the way of contents than the old Advertiser. I think Ron will really have to work to equal past records, and this issue shows he can do it.

DEVIANT #4: 20c; Carol McKinney, Sta. 1, Box 514, Provo, Utah, with Elizabeth Pope co-editor; published quarterly. This is what I call the real, honest-to-gosh type of fanzine. Perfectly mimeographed on colored paper (blue this time), with good fan artwork all through it, articles, fiction, poetry, and letter column. The new issue will be in March, which is about the time you read this. Richard Geis has an article, "Psychotic and Me", which gives the story of his fanzine (which will be reviewed elsewhere in this column.). He begins his article with, " . . . I've grown up in fandom from a dewy-eyed inexperienced faned to a beery-eyed experienced faned (short for fan editor). The story of how I managed to accomplish the change is a harrowing one, I assure you . . ." He goes on from there. "Cities of the Atom," by Dorothy Hansen, is intensely interesting; it's her account of those cities built up around our atomic energy plants, where her father has worked. Harlan Ellison, in "Vista," has a top story. I didn't know he could write so well.

PSYCHOTIC: #17; 20c; Richard Geis, 2631 N. Mississippi, Portland 12, Oregon; first lithographed issue! One free sample copy will be sent to anyone who sends his name and address, Dick says. Okay, but two dimes won't break anyone, and the zine is worth it. Thirty-two pages. "The Leather Couch" is the editorial. Best title in the issue is "Times Have Changed?" "Dirty Pro" by Larry Stark is "a story which is a curious blending of straight fiction and fun content." A real crazy magazine . . . From the same city is

NUCLEONICS #3: no price, but send him a dime; L. S. Bourne, 3709 S. E. Hawthorne, Portland, Ore. Dittoed, "The Tragedy of Elmer Bratley" is the sad story of a fan who had to marry a girl who swiped one of his fanzines to get the fanzine, "Suicide," by Ruth Al-

lison is a mood story about Venus. The art section, though not about nude women like so many such departments, is worth looking at. Good stf ideas. Don Day, by request, authored the article on how he became a fan. He does it by saying he can't because he doesn't know what a fan is. There are Little Willy poems too. (Little Willy with a shiver, pushed poor sister in the river; I hope this doesn't arouse your ire, because his sister was on fire.) You like?

KAYMAR TRADER: #90; 10c; K. Martin Carlson, 1028 Third Ave., Moorhead, Minn. The biggest ad in this issue is Gerry de la Ree's, covering several pages and listing hundreds of books he is selling out of his stfantasy library, most of them from a dollar to two dollars. Donald Susan, in a brief article, lists the twenty-five books that form the nucleus of a basic fantasty library. This is separate from science fiction. Ninety percent of the 28 pages is tightly packed ads on books and magazines, wanted for sale, for trade. This is the zine for you if your needs or interests fall in those categories. Don't send for Trader just out of curiosity though, because Mr. Carlson already has more subscribers than he feels he can handle comfortably in his hobby of publishing.

THE SAUCERIAN: 35c; Jan. 1955; quarterly, photo-offset; Gray Barker, Box 2228, Clarksburg, W. Va. Forty-eight pages, with pictures galore of flying saucers. You'd think they would exhaust the newsworthy material on saucers, but this issue is as new and interesting as the last one. Quite a sharp group of people are working with Gray Barker to put out this zine. As an example of sharpness, not missing possibilities, on page 7 they discuss the recent observation of Mars made from South Africa, which resulted in the announcement that Mars has vegetable life of a low order, and they raise the question, "Was more discovered and the news suppressed? Higher forms of animal life, for example?" This isn't a fanzine but is put out the same way and on a subject of great interest to plenty of you readers, so I will continue to include it in the reviews.

UNDERTAKINGS: 15c; Sam Johnson, 1517 Penny Dr., Edgewood, Elizabeth City, N. C. That's a rather complicated address. This is a general purpose fanzine, with stories, articles, poems, and artwork, all mimeographed . There's even a serious discussion of whether anything exists or not, centering around whether the point exists or is merely an abstraction. I think the argument missed the point, but then, points are hard to hit anyway, and unlike bullseyes, when you do hit them you can't tell if

you did or not because there's no hole in the target. The hole always shows up in the head of the marksman instead. This fanzine is somewhat bulky, because sixteen pound paper was used and that's too light to mimeo on both sides. But that doesn't detract from the contents.

EPITOME: #2; 10c; Mike May, 9428 Hobart St., Dallas 18, Texas. Mimeo, with a mimeo cover illo by Ted White, (Ooops! I wasn't going to mention Ted White any more after the snide trick he pulled on poor Jacob Edwards.) Best thing in this issue is Boob Stewart's account of the convention at San Francisco. I think convention committees should come to better understandings with the hotels, the conventions are held in. The Sir Francis Drake, from all reports, should never have been chosen under any circumstances. Its numerous house dicks broke up parties consistently and ejected people from the hotel who didn't have a room there, all— apparently — on the theory that people travelling thousands of miles to their hotels do so only to sleep, and no one else has any rights. The annual convention brings a chunk of ten or fifteen thousand dollars to the convention hotel. For that money we deserve reasonable treatment. The hotel should be made to agree ahead of time to reserve complete floors for the convention.

The results of the voting for the 1955 con site show that it pays to advertise. Cleveland informed the world all year that it wanted the con in 1955, and got it by a landslide vote of 135 to Detroit's 57 and Buffalo's 12.

There's a letter column, articles, and a story, to round out the issue, but Stewart's seven page report of his experiences at the 1954 convention are the big thing this issue, and by far the best report I've read. While we're on California, I'll briefly review the fanzines from that area. They are FOG and VULCAN.

FOG: 10c; Don Wegars, 2444 Valley St., Berkeley 2, Calif. Ditto, nicely done, cover by Ted Whi — oops, I almost mentioned him again. A rambling contents that makes you feel at home with the guys in its pages. Terry Carr authors an article called "Stuff and Nonsense," which opens with, "Pardon my excess acidity, but it seems to me that fans have a rather starry-eyed approach to science fiction."

VULCAN: 15c; quarterly; Terry Carr, 134 Cambridge St., San Francisco 12, Calif. Gray paper with red ink mimeography, making a nice variation. This is more or less the official rambling of the Golden Gate Futurian Society, with articles and stories, and in this issue a whole space opera done with Terry's "Face Critters."

Jumping back to Texas, we have.

TART: 10c; George Jennings, 11121 Tascosa Dr., Dallas, Texas Thirteen pages. You can get a 6 issue subscription for 30c, and it's full of letters and editorial and other live doings. Ron Ellik reports on his visit to LASFS, the Los Angeles club, at 1301 Ingraham St., on their anniversary meeting last fall . Fun.

ISFA: I'm going to group all the Indiana fanzines under one review this time, since space is running out. Indiana is the fanzinest state in the Union right now. Eight copies under four titles. They are EISFA, 5c, Robert Coulson, 626 Court St., Huntington, Ind.; GALACTIC POST, 15c, Ray Beam, 1326 N. New Jersey St., Indianapolis, Ind.; STF, official organ of the Ind. Science Fiction League, c/o Lee Anne Tremper, 1022 N. Tuxedo St., Indianapolis 1, Ind.; PHOBOS, bi-weekly, 5c, also by Lee Anne. Indiana has quite a large group of active fans, and if you live there you should get acquainted with them and join their activities. No matter where you live you can't get more and better fanzines from one source, that take you into all the avenues of fandom, because these Indiana fans are on the ball. Send for any one of their zines and before long you'll want all of them —and get them.

We'll swing over to Illinois for two zines, down to St. Louis for one, jump down to Oklahoma, then up to Canada, and from there wind up in Ireland to the last fanzines. Quite a trip, so let's go!

SPIRAL: 10c; Denis Moreen, 214 Ninth St., Wilmette, Ill. That's just north of Chicago. Issue #9, Nov. 1954. No artwork, and mostly a personalzine, which means that Denis is very active in fandom, and pools all his contacts and comments on everything fannish into his zine.

BREVZINE: Only a subscription price of a dollar is listed, but I would suggest sending a dime for a sample copy first, with all fanzines, rather than subscribing blind. Wanda Leslie, 5369 W. 89th St., Oak Lawn, Illinois. There are three stories in this issue of 19 pages. Also a reader column of excerpts from letters, taking up only one page. If you're interested in amateur story writing, this might be your best bet.

FAN: #1; 5c; bi-monthly, Ronald Voigt, 3859 Sullivan, St. Louis, Mo., "for fen who like to write sf as well as read it." Twelve pages, interesting reading, with good artwork, all mimeo. Another zine for you amateur fiction writers.

NITE CRY: 10c; bi-monthly; Don Chappell, 5921 E. 4th Pl., Tulsa, Oklahoma. Nov. 1954 issue. Good stories, fan articles, and the usual stuff in fanzines, plus something no other fanzine has had. A regular feature on what happened

way back when. The sources are fanzines of that past period, which is 1936 this time. A review of fanzines of that year, and fan activities, as well as prozines. "Science Fiction News rolled off the press, dated October. It was set by hand in 10 point type on beautiful slick paper, 16 pages." Dan McPhail makes this department worthwhile for every fan who would like to know what went on way back when.

It's also the official organ of the stf club in Oklahoma, so if you live in that state you should get in touch with Don about meetings.

There are two Canadian fanzines. A BAS, and CANADIAN FANDOM, both in Toronto. CANADIAN FANDOM, 15c, Gerald Steward, 166 McRoberts Ave., Toronto 10, has been published somewhat regularly over the past twelve years by various editors. This is the Dec. issue. Under Hobby Reports is a report on world tape pals. That is a growing hobby of owners of tape recorders, corresponding by tape. Only story this issue is "The Flying Saucers Have Taken Off" by Daryl Sharp. Can Fan is always well put out, with a good cover.

A BAS: no price listed; Boyd Raeburn, 9 Glenvalley Dr., Toronto 9. Several poems, good articles, but mostly about Toronto fans and by Toronto fans. You'll like it. And now to zoom over to Ireland. Oops. I overshot. I'm in England. I'll review BEM while here.

BEM: one science fiction magazine such as this copy of Other Worlds you are reading; Tom White, 3, Vine St., Cutler Heights, Bradford 4, Yorks, England, assisted by Mal Ashworth. The entire atmosphere of a British fanzine is difficult, and fresh. Even the artwork has a difficult flavor to it.

The mimeography is sharper. I wonder how they get it that fine? (The Supermousecon," by Archie Mercer, is an "Archie and Mehitabel) type of story, very amusing. "Rum and Splash," a poem by Brian Lewis, starts off, "Now! Say, it's warm in here, a typically fannish atmosphere. What's that Pat? No, I don't drink beer, I'll have a rum and splash. Well hi there Ina, Normal too, and John and Dave, here's health to you, with such a friendly fannish crew, this party shouldn't crash." It goes on in the same easy rhythm, and if more poetry was like it I could like poetry, because I liked this. Forty pages, and not a boring bit in the lot, eh wot? Right HO! And now back to bloody ol' — that is, blinkin' ol' — jolly ol' (is the word) Highrelund. (I c'n carry the rum. It was the splash that did it, ol' bean . . .)

HYPHEN: Nov., same deal on trading one copy of any stf maga-

zine for one copy; Walt Willis, 170 Upper Newtownards Rd., Belfast, N. Ireland. Walt always puts out a top fanzine. He has several really screaming cartoons in this issue, most screaming of which is the front cover, depicting an entire stf fan club getting out a fanzine in the display room of a duplicator and office equipment company while the salesmen stand around hoping to sell "all those customers" some equipment. Anyone who has taken part in a publishing spree, with typers going stencil artists concentrating, joefan cranking the mimeo, page sorters monopolizing the floor, will laugh his head off. The place will be a wreck when they get done, and you know sumpin? Not a one of those fans has a DIME! Hyphen's contents are a mixture of statesides and islands. Damon Knight discusses Sam Moskowitz and what's wrong with stf. He says incompetent writers and bean brained editors are all that's wrong with stf. "The Path of True Love," by Pamela Bulmer, concerns a femme fanne who must confess her hidden secret of fanning to her True Love. Only to discover He is a Trufan in disguise.

I could spend fifteen pages reviewing HYPHEN, but I've reached the end of my space. If you haven't ever seen a fanzine, you've missed something. Let's try something. Right now, Take a slip of paper and write your name and address on it. Take some tape and fasten a dime to it. Put it in an envelope and address it to the fanzine whose review interested you or stuck with you up to this point. Stick a stamp on it and mail it. Simple. Then forget it. Before the next issue of Other Worlds comes around, you will have your fanzine and will have read it. Then the CLUB HOUSE will belong to you. You'll know more what it's all about. You won't regret it, I'm sure.

And you fan eds, keep 'em coming. The more the merrier. Send them to the editorial address, or directly to me at Apt. 308, 6613 S. Normal, Chicago 21, Illinois.

—Rog Phillips

LETTERS

Address:
Editor
Other Worlds
P.O. Box 56, Sta. V
Cincinnati 10, Ohio

Dear Ray,

As in my previous letter, I'm writing to you personally, because I don't like the way you have treated science-fantasy. On my bed before me, I have spread every issue of Other Worlds, Science Stories, Universe, and Mystic. I started reading s-f in the beginning of '52 and when Hamling's mag began losing it's appeal (it startted printing a lot of "good" science fiction) Other Worlds became my favorite. I had faith in you and subscribed in early September. This faith proved worthy, because with the November wish you really began rolling with one of Shaver's better stories, *Scarpein of Delta Sira,* following up with Alan Nourse's Q-B-B and your even better *Identity of Sue Tenet* in December, E. F. Russel's *Somewhere A Voice* in January, Temple's *Field of Battle* in February, your *Diagnosis* in March as well as the very good *Tedric* the TREMENDOUS (in length *and* quality) *Myshkin* by David V. Reed, and in the same issue is really top notch novelette, *New Moon,* by somebody with the odd name of Raymond A. Palmer. The last three issues I can only think of in sorrow, the 78,000 word serial by Byrne which puts him down in my mind as one of science fiction's greats, Bloch's fascinating *Thinking Cap* and McConnell's beautiful *Game of White,* these marked the swan song of the best science fiction magazine in the "modern" field. The great fiction content was carried over in Science Stories but the great atmosphere of the long letter column was missing. In it's short life, it only published one bad story, *Secret of Pierre Cotreau* by Frank Patton (and this is one time I hate to admit that Patton is your pet pen name; in fact I hope it might have been someone else who perpetrated that trash). Now to Universe.

There have been eight issues of Universe, all have been good, but only three and seven come up to my idea of the Palmer standard. Only two of your covers could really have appealed to me and they were ruined by being (I think) photographs of the orginial paintings. When I think of the Smith (I assume) saucer cover in color I could send a bomb to one Rap. Bea is doing a good job with the fiction, but at the current rate I'm afraid your magazine is not going to stay on top in my opinion too much longer. One illustration, and that one no good. Next, I suppose you'll drop thirty more pages; maybe even fold!

And why? It appears that Ray has now become an out and out mystic. He is so occupied with thoughts of getting The Word across to us in Mystic that he is willing to sacrifice colored paintings (and even illustrations for Universe), the fiction content of Mystic, and Science Stories to do it. I couldn't get one page into any of your articles or even features this issue Ray, they were too completely boring. I won't go into the esthetic side of the mag. Unless the next issue marks a return of the fiction (all of which has ranged from good to exceptional), I have bought my last issue!

Ray, I said that Bea was doing a good job on Universe and I mean it, but I don't think that's enough. Under Bea's guidance and your monetary restrictions, Universe is becoming just another good science fiction mag. In my opinion you have double crossed stf, your readers, and fandom. In the August issue of Mystic you admitted having lost two thousand dollars per issue, judging by the fact that your magazine doesn't seem to sell any better here than it ever did, you have now sunk some fifteen thousand dollars in Mystic. No wonder you can't afford illos, color; or even an art director. I'm beginning to wonder just why you quit the science fiction field, in all your editorials in OW enthusiasm seemed to be the reading the most recent editorial in Mystic, I'm about ready to think you've given up because you think the world will come to an end before you can get anywhere. Maybe it will, but you could at least give it the old college try. In several editorials you stated that you edited and published stf because its fun, whasamatter no more fun? Remember when you poked fun at Howard Browne and Willi—Bill Hamling, yakking about driving Bill to soaking his head in the Evanston canal. You talked about 320 pages; boy, you sure must give up your dreams easily!

What happened to the Ray Pal-

mer who sold more magazines than any other editor? Where's the super - fan that took over Amazing and proceeded to make it the greatest s-f mag ever? Where's the Ray Palmer who discovered authors like Don Wilcox, David Vern (also known as David V. Reed), Robert Moore Williams, William P. McGivern, Leroy Yerxa, Nelson S. Bond, Robert Bloch, Richard Shaver, S. J. Byrne, Rog Phillips, and probably others I've either not known about or have forgotten? Where's the Palmer who discovered those three writers-turned-editor William Hamling, Chester S. Geier, and Howard Browne?

I hope you haven't quit after all that development because of a key word in your thinking. After slump and some darn good competition. If you'd stuck with OW and left Mystic alone maybe we'd have a 130 page monthly now instead of the two deteriorating mags which threaten to fold at any time. Ah well, no use crying over spilt milk.

Once again I complain about the title of your mag. I'm tired of asking an s-f reader what he thought of the new Universe, and getting replies talking about that monthly competitor of yours, Fantastic Universe. I know Universe came out a month before it, but most of the non-fan readers don't. Anyway, Universe as a title doesn't have much appeal to me.

I may be wrong in many of my suppositions, but I honestly believe that if you don't get on the proverbial ball your magazine is headed for mediocrity or death.

Once more I'll close saying that before you quit you were my favorite editor.

Yours truly,

Jack Hunter
454 Atrisco Dr. S.W.
Albuquerque, N. M.

Dear Jack Hunter (Or should it be Jack the Ripper?): I gotta defend myself! I just ain't given up at all! I'm just getting started. This issue ought to prove it. You liked OW? Okay, here she is again, and we intend to pile it on! We ain't folding nothing! We are gaining a full head of 'steam. We have finally convinced all the competition to go soak its head and quit, and the ones that are left are our friends! Now we can get back to business! No, I ain't turned "mystic" and I ain't out to spread the word. I'm out to make some money while having fun—and I get fun out of BOTH sf and mystic. I dumped $40,000. *on OW, so MYSTIC is still far behind. But BOTH are now making money! I expect I'll make lots of it before I get through. Even enough to pay up my debts! Thanks for giving me credit for all those things. Most of them were pure accidents, and*

worked in spite of me! As for color paintings for covers, the cost isn't worth it. Experiment has proved they don't sell one copy more. Now let our competitors see this statement, and all rush to photos (and they will all fold!). See how smart I am? I dare them to try it! As for Bill Hamling, you'd die laughing yourself if you see him trying to figure me out these days! He'd like to try photos, only he don't dare, because he don't trust me! He thinks I'm lying about my circulation, and only trying to ruin him. So I can steal his six kids! I agree with you, Jack, that his stories stink, but Bill's a hard man to argue with, when he's got you by 10,000 *readers! As for Howard Browne, he's laying out old copies of Palmer AMAZINGS on his bed these days, and "doin' what comes natural". AMAZING ought to improve rapidly now. Howard sells about* 45,000, *so he's got both Bill and me beat! Bill claims GALAXY is selling* 60,000, *and ASTOUNDING about* 72,000. *Makes him crazy jealous. Bill's a funny guy that way — he thinks one end of the line is better than the other. But he worries so! McGivern? FILTHY RICH! He writes great stuff, gets in Cosmo, the movies, books—and lives most of the time in Italy! Great guy, Bill McGivern. Did right well after he tore away from me. As for the fiction in Mystic, we'd put some of it in OTHER WORLDS, but lotsa people think anything like Shaver used to write is junk. Ah me! A few people like you keep yelling it's tops. How am I gonna know for sure? Every time I run it, sales go up, but fan letters scream murder. Them deros sure must write letters day and night to mislead me! I ask you, all you readers, DO you or do you NOT carry a grudge against any science fiction with mystic overtones? Why, if you WANTED it, I could get you stuff by Rog Phillips that would beat anything he ever wrote before! I could get stuff by S. J. Byrne that would make you jump for joy. I could write some myself that would even excite me! But brother, you gotta convince BEA! I'm asking you now, what would happen, if I ran some of that stuff? What would happen if I ran brand new Shaver stuff? (Lissen! I usually plotted Shaver's stories. Much of his "mystery" is right out of my head. What if I said it was all a darn lie, thunk up by me? Would it make you mad, and make you cancel your sub? Or would you say: "Okay, then let's have some more real sensational stories from Shaver, Byrne, Phillips, et al, and plot the whole works, if you want to! But only give us tremendous stuff!" You say I lack enthusiasm. How would you like to*

see in print a novel that I think is the best science fiction ever written, bar none! I've long considered printing it in book form, and then discarded the idea because $3.00 is too much to pay for any story while a magazine is around to print it in that costs only 35c. 185,000 of you guys bought AMAZING when I was running Shaver. Only 45,000 of you buy it when I don't! I should have my head examined! How come AMAZING lost 140,000 readers? And don't say (like some misinformed fans do) that it was because ZD fired me! I quit! Resigned. Real friendly like. Couldn't stand city life no more, and moved to Wisconsin. If any doubt it, why don't you ask Mr. Davis, the boss of ZD, than whom there never was a grander guy! AMAZING would have lost its circulation, even if I stayed on! The reason was something even I didn't foresee—the decline of stf. The FACT is that MYSTIC and FATE are the new up and comers! The new phase of "fantasy" in literature. Stf is washed up. So far as the mass of the public is concerned. The ONLY way OTHER WORLDS can really stay in there, and be published ten years from now, is for it to evolve along the LOGICAL lines that stf has evolved! Material science has outstripped stf; psychic SCIENCE is far ahead of it. Me, I know! I am a genius at seeing the future. And I kick myself every day for not following my hunch! You say you LIKE the stuff that has the psychic science in it. (You mention all the yarns that contain it, many in concealed form, sugarcoated, but there all the same.) But if I label it out and out in its true form, you scream! I don't run fiction in MYSTIC, and you say "that's the last I'll buy!" Do you REALLY MEAN that if I ran those yarns in OTHER WORLDS,

WHAT WOULD YOU DO

if you found

A GOOD THING?

You'd pass it on to your friends, wouldn't you? Well, that's exactly what Ray Palmer is doing in this ad, which is a personal endorsement.

TURN-ER'S

It Turns Hair Back To Its Natural Color, And It Cures Dandruff Positively.

ONE BOTTLE WILL DO IT!

$5.00

WRITE:

GUY L. TURNER

Box 145-P

BOISE, IDAHO

And Tell Him Ray Sent You

you WOULD buy it? Let's cut out this feinting—are you fans ashamed to admit that you ACTUALLY and SECRETLY think that mystic fiction is science fiction? Hell! If you DO, I could give you stories that would stir your enthusiasm to the point of loud cheers. No wonder Rog Phillips, Richard Shaver, S. J. Byrne, and a whole host of other top writers are discouraged. You don't seem to know what you want. You READ mystic fiction, and you SAY science fiction! I say science fiction and mystic fiction are one and the same—FANTASY, based on FACT, and projected in IMAGINATION into the future. ESP is a fact today, and it follows that there is an "extra-sensary dimension" we can journey into. The trouble with you guys is that somehow you've got the word "religion" mixed up in this! That's why you say I am out to "spread the word." I'm no preacher! I live in the world of tomorrow, and more and more it's a mental and psychic world. Rockets and space travel are "old hat!" Science fiction has gone beyond fact in the past, and if it no longer does (and it no longer does!) it isn't science fiction any more. Only a half-dozen writers live today who can write BEYOND the headlines in the newspapers, and write even half as well as the corniest copy-boy in a daily newspaper. And the trouble is, our readers haven't the imagination to go any further than the copy-boy. Look, if your dead grandmother exists, somewhere, she exists as a FACT, but to us, it isn't proven yet. Science fiction could project the possible proof onto paper. Who knows what marvelous adventures your dead grandmother is having in another and REAL dimension? Why, if we write about those adventures in imagination, you bristle and bridle and yell "superstition" or "religion" or "crackpot"? And you moan about how we are losing our grip. We ain't lost our grip, you just fell offen the wagon! And if I could only find 10,000 of you who would climb back on (tickets $3.00 for 12 issues) and then let me drive, you might see some unusual scenery. But you ain't got either the guts nor the imagination, and maybe the three bucks.

I have 30,000 readers. Presumably they like OTHER WORLDS. But I'll bet there ain't 300 among 'em would subscribe for a principle, and that goes even for the Shaver fans. Yes, I can sell magazines. But instead I am aiming at a principle, and you don't get nowhere with that! I'll close with one more remark: Einstein, in his latest book where he tells his mystic philosophy, is selling more copies than all his other scientific works combined! Sometimes I get so mad at you guys!—Rap.

PERSONALS

Send postcard to James Brook, 545 W. 111th St., New York City, 25 for a list of about 400 magazines dating back to the '30s, which are for sale . . . *Wanted: aSF, June* 1955. *Will buy, or swap for British mags. E. Leslie, Nightingale Cottage, Carls Colne, Colchester, Essex, England* . . . . Set of 12 different photos for $1. Taken at the Metro-Con, they include: Asimov, Leinster, Eshbach, del Rey, Nourse, Lee Riddle, Honey Wood, Metro the Robot, and others. For complete list write to Maurice Lubin, 14 Jones St., Worcester, Mass. Also, The Actifan, today's journal of active stf fans around the world. To be published soon. 10c a copy from Maurice Lubin . . .*More than* 200 *stf mags and* 70 *PBs for sale or trade. Write for complete list. Tom Richardson,* 138 *Oceanview Rd., Lynbrook, N. Y.* . . . Want joke mags: Nippy, Stare, Joker Pack-O-Fun, Jest, Zippy or any others old and new. Will swap stf mags or books. Also have 100 English stf items to trade. I can use pre-'42 comic books. Bill Deppe, Pollocksville, N. Car . . . *Have* 25 *issues of AS from Dec.'44 to '48 for sale. Write for list. D. Kier,* 370 *E. 33rd, Eugene, Oreg* . . . Wanted: any Burroughs books, or magazines containing his stories, in any condition. For sale; three '36 Astoundings with Lovecraft's "At Mountains of Madness." Want to correspond with anyone interested in Burroughs. Wm. MacPherson, 1056 Avenue "C," Bayonne, N. J. . . .*For sale: Boy's life, March '46 to July* 50; *over* 400 *stf mags from '51 to date; over* 100 *hard-cover books and* 200 *PBs of all types including stf; stacks of comic books. Send your want lists. I probably don't have it, but be a sport. John Courtois* 318 *E. Commercial St., Appleton, Wisc* . . . Wanted: authentic complete copy of Richard S. Shaver's Mantong Alphabet. Please. Robert D. Harker, Jr., 726 Fourth St., Hollister, Calif. *Wanted: copies of "The Star Kings" and "Starmen of Llyrdis." Lila Neuman, Shushan, N. Y.* . . . The Internation Fan Corresponding Club is interested in getting new members. For information, write to Joel Covey, 6 Rugg St., St. Albans, Vt . . . *Want OW,*

(*Concluded on page* 130)

Editorial ★

(*Continued from page* 6)

know *who* he is; nor *what;* nor *how!* He doesn't even know *when;* in short, he doesn' t know what time it is! He doesn't even know if Time really exists. He doesn't know what Space is. He doesn't know if it's a place for something to be, or a place where something is not. You sum it all up, and he doesn't know a *single thing!*

In the past, science fiction has predicted the future. And by jingo, the future has come to pass. In a way, we've come full circle, because we admit that we predict certain refined aspects of the future already predicted in its great generality, but that further amplification is just amplification and nothing more, and not at all stimulating to the imagination. When Jules Verne invented the submarine, there was no such thing! It fired the imagination. Countless stories were written in which the submarine was the means of adventure. But today, if you write a story, in which a submarine appears, you have a wonderful chance of being quite dull—if you depend on the submarine itself to excite the imagination of the reader. Today. Today, all science fiction is in the same boat— sunk! You've got to have more than *science fiction* in your story to fire the imagination to new heights. But what?

Fantasy has always been synonym for imagination. Thus, science fiction IS imagination. Thus, what we will have to use to fire future imaginations is IMAGINATION. (Please don't be misguided, this is not a plug for Bill Hamling's IMAGINATION. His rag is a plain out and out half-hearted stab at naked pitchers.) (Okay, okay! *Point* at our cover! But we offered this Finlay to Bill Hamling and he wouldn't accept it (in full color!) We couldn't just throw it away!) OTHER WORLDS is the only magazine that has Ray Palmer. No other magazine can make that statement (except MYSTIC.) Thus, OTHER WORLDS is the only magazine that has imagination. We have it, because Ray Palmer has hit on the answer to science fiction's future course, and what it must do to *remain* fantasy, and not just fact. Who's interested in reading a *fiction* story of a ship that travels to Mars? It's much more interesting to read about the *actual work* going on in the present in our daily newspaper. We know, beyond doubt, that all the science fiction "headlines" in the imaginative tales of the past are going to be repeated in reality, from day to day. We will be interested in watching them come true. But we won't be

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fired with imagination; we won't look eagerly for each other coming moment to "see what it will bring." We'll *know* what it will bring, and our only interest will be in the *sight variations in detail* the reality has over the fantasy. The suspense is gone. The interest is gone —for we who are *capable* of something beyond the mundane; for those of us who aspire to be mental creators.

We created the space ship, long ago. Now let the mechanics take over and actually forge the nuts and bolts, and let the test pilots take them into space, and let the explorers map the stars.

We want to go on creating!

But what?

OTHER WORLDS now has a secret key to the answer! As you read future issues of OTHER WORLDS, you will begin to find your imagination being staggered, as it once was when space travel burst upon it in all its intriguing aspects through the pages of the earliest magazine. Now OTHER WORLDS is going to open NEW WORLDS to your imagination. It is going to venture into unexplored reaches of the mind, and once more give significance to the words science fiction, fantasy and imagination.

Remember! What man can imagine, he can do! For many years we have parroted that statement,

but we've never *really* believed it! We had a lot of private mental reservations when we said it, or heard it said. We said to ourselves —except make a single hair on our head, or a plastic that will grow, like a fingernail, or raise the dead or a host of other things we *know* are "not for us."

OTHER WORLDS intends to journey into incredible worlds, not out in space a few paltry parsecs away, but an illimitable distance into the reaches of the mind!

Once we read a story in which the central character (and there was only one) was a man who sat immovable in a chair in a sealed room, and never spoke, or even breathed, to all intents and purposes. Yet an aura of suspence was set up that rooted us to our chair, as he was rooted. We don't know yet what happened, or if anything did. We were supposed to realize that nothing did, that the author only cleverly made us think something was going to, but never did. We've always disagreed with that analysis (and it was the author's own.) Something *did* happen. It happened in our minds. Terrific suspense was born, and *happened* to us. It was *real* suspense. Any actual occurrence that had come to cap that suspense would have been anti-climactic, would have been a letdown.

The mind is a strange, a myster-

LIFE MAGAZINE recently published this amazing report: "Good solid citizens . . . who had the reputation of being reliable swore they had seen extraterrestrial vehicles and unearthly men. In the French National Assembly, Deputy Pierre de Leotard . . . demanded to know if the invasion threatened France's security."

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ious, a wonderful thing. We don't know a thing about it! But we can travel about it in imagination at will, if we but dare!

Let's imagine the things man *can't* do—even after he has imagined them! Let's embark *truly* for a voyage to OTHER WORLDS! Let's write some stories of what man *can't* do! You authors, think about it! Surely all of you can think of something *instantly* that man can't do, in spite of the much-abused axiom that has (up to now) been the foundation of science fiction, and which has, like a foundation of sand, melted away from beneath it and plunged it into the sea of "so what."

You readers—stick with us and watch the editor and the author begin to present this new "hotfoot" to fantastic literature. Ray Palmer thinks it will be quite an adventure!

However, let us say that it will take a little courage. You'll have to open your mind, clear it of previous concepts, and let the breeze blow through it unobstructed. A lot of you, who really aren't science fiction fans, but only western story readers with ray guns instead of six guns, won't be able to stand the draft.

There are authors among you who are used to 3c a word (paid by *Galaxy* and *Astounding,* with a 1c bonus for being clever enough to write yourself the most letters ratting, it first). You'll be lucky indeed to get ½c for your "new type" science fiction manuscript. And if you don't sell it to us, you may have to wait twenty years until you can sell it to our successors and imitators (just as every science fiction author finally sold every old rag that he could dredge out of his trunk because of the manuscript shortage that faced the crowd of money-hungry publishers) That's the way all things go—once they catch on, and become a fad, they get milked dry. Every one of you who lacked the conscience to tear up those turkeys, rather than foist them on unsuspecting and inexperienced "Johnny-come-lately" science fiction publishers, can only blame yourselves for the bust, that followed your boom. You came up with tripe when the big market opened, and it folded fast. You can't give out with inferior goods when the market gets big. You can fool a lot of people—once.

When you first give them a really good product, you haven't the backing to advertise it, and you haven't a chance to overcome the hypnotic sway the "established" has on the multitude. So you have to keep plugging away, interesting this person, then that, until finally there are enough of them to attract attention. Then, suddenly, bang!

And right at that moment, you haul out your first inferior, experimental products, and pour them on the counter—and you can smell the reaction all over the place. What if Ford ran out of 1955 models and suddenly began dishing out 1951 models hoping, the customers wouldn't notice? They'd notice, all right, and Ford wouldn't sell one out of ten of his 1956 models!

That's what you writers did when your big chance came along! Blame yourselves. And blame those of us who bought and published the stuff. So now, we've got to start all over. We've got to put out with a brand new, completely retooled model of science fiction in the face of the fact that the buyer is completely soured, and will walk a mile to avoid picking up your brand. So, don't expect 3c a word! You won't get it.

And if any of you skeptics think OTHER WORLDS won't get the "new look," stick around and see! You can always read the first few pages at the newstands, and save your 35c! We aren't worried about that. We know that when the fire lights in your imagination, you'll dig down, but fast. If you weren't a man with a mind, you wouldn't even be *looking* for something new! And that's what science fiction is—imagination, than which there is nothing newer! —*Rap*

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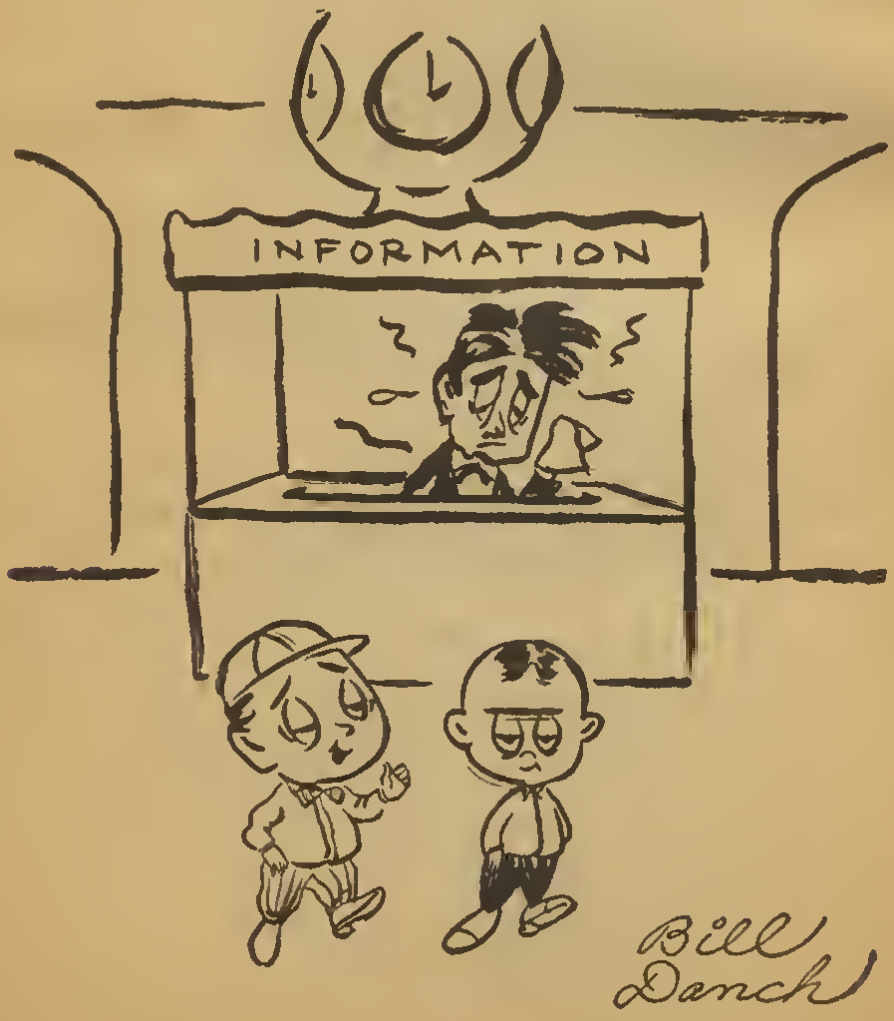
PERSONALS

(*Continued from page* 124)

Feb. '52, containing second half of "These Are My Children," by Rog Phillips. Mrs. G. W. Harding, 209 South, "K" St., *Livingston Mont* . . . For sale, non-stf items in fair condition: Dime Detective, Apr. 1, '35; May 1, '34; Oct. 1, '34. Shadow, Sept. 15, '34 and Nov. 15, '34. Nick Carter, Apr. '36. Also ERB's "Beasts of Tarzan"— first edition. John Weaver, 910 W. 9th, Emporia, Kans . . *For sale, in excellent condition*: 8 *John Carter of Mars books and* 22 *Tarzan books at* $1 *each. Also "Cave Girl," "The Moon Maid," "Land That Time Forgot" and "At The Earth's Core." All by Burroughs. Also have stf mags and PBs, and Flash Gordon Big Little Books. Luther Cook, P. O. Box* 731, *Visalia, Calif.*



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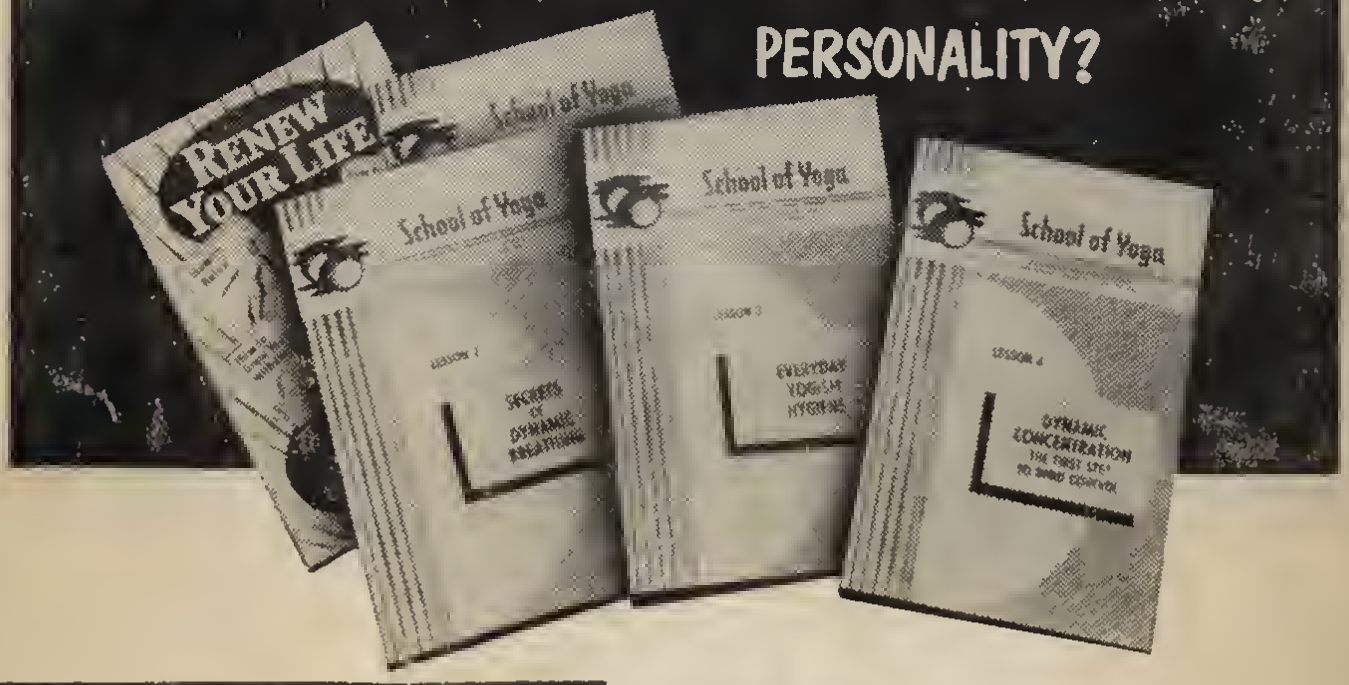

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